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# Shelburne Essays

By

Paul Elmer More

*Second Series*

Οὐ γὰρ πρό γε τῆς ἀληθείας τιμητέος ἀνήρ.

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## ADVERTISEMENT

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# SHELBURNE ESSAYS

SECOND SERIES

## ELIZABETHAN SONNETS

THE Introduction to Mr. Sidney Lee's reprint of the Elizabethan Sonnets, in *Arber's English Garner*,[1] has fallen plumply into the quiet waters of criticism. Since the gracious appearance of Charles Lamb we have grown accustomed to speak of every versifier of the great Queen's days with bated breath; their freshness, their exquisite felicity, their unflagging inventiveness, have become a byword of praise among all whose reading of the period extends beyond Shakespeare. But now comes this iconoclast, with his terrifying knowledge of the three hundred thousand sonnets produced by Europe in the sixteenth century, and declares roundly, nay, proves beyond cavil, that

[1] *Elizabethan Sonnets*, newly arranged and edited. With an Introduction by Sidney Lee. Vols. XI. and XII. of *An English Garner*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1904.

the famous sonnet-sequences of Sidney and Spenser and Daniel and Drayton, to name only the better known, are a mere tissue of words and ideas stolen from Italy and France. Worse than that, a number of these poems are lifted solidly from Petrarch and Ronsard and others without a sign of credit or apology. It is shocking, but, to be perfectly frank, his argument only confirms the opinion which many have begun to hold, that it would be an act of wisdom to revise our somewhat unreasonable estimate of the whole Elizabethan literature.

In one respect it may seem that Mr. Lee has gone too far. Because a poem is manifestly an imitation or even a barefaced theft, it does not always follow that the incident described is unreal or that the sentiment is insincere. Sidney's sonnet on his victory in a tournament—

> Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance
> Guided so well that I obtained the prize—

may very well be modelled on Petrarch's account of a Court entertainment, but it would be captious to conclude that such a tourney did not actually take place, or that the chivalrous knight was not heartened in the combat by Stella's "heavenly face." Again the same cavalier's apostrophe to his couch—

> Ah, bed! the field where joy's peace some do see,
> The field where all my thoughts to war be trained—

is no doubt an echo of innumerable cries from sleepless Petrarchists, yet the emotion may be sincere enough for all that. It is a fairly common thing, I suppose, for young poets to be in love and to tumble their beds—and to make capital of their agony the next morning in whatever tags of rhyme they can summon up. There is thus a certain danger in dogmatising too absolutely about any particular sonnet.

With this caveat, however, I am prepared to follow Mr. Lee in his somewhat sweeping denunciation of the Elizabethan sonneteers. His collection embraces fifteen series, extending from Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, published in 1591 (though composed earlier), to Robert Tofte's *Laura, the Toys of a Traveller*, published in 1597, and including the work of Watson, Barnes, Lodge, Constable, Daniel, Drayton, Spenser, and others of less renown. Shakespeare, it will be observed, is omitted, and Sidney, as Mr. Lee himself admits, rises in part fairly above the level of the sonneteering herd; but with these exceptions it must be acknowledged that the perusal of this branch of Elizabethan literature is likely to prove a dull task to most readers. All that was required was a moderate acquaintance with Desportes or some other writer of the Pleiad and a modicum of skill in making rhymes, and, look you, your ambitious gentleman was ready to bestow immortality on any Diana or Delia who might offer to break his heart.

Write! write! help! help, sweet Muse! and never cease!
In endless labours pens and papers tire!
Until I purchase my long-wished Desire,

exclaimed the fluent Barnabe Barnes, speaking for himself and his brothers; but it was against the Petrarchian canon that the long-wished desire should ever be satisfied, and hence these "grief's commentaries" never ending. Of actual experience or observation there is, so far as the language betrays, painfully little. The whole thing is a juggling with traditional figures and phrases. One might go through these passionate pretences, pencil in hand, and check off the score or more recurring themes with perfect ease. There is the Phœnix, springing from fire and fit symbol of ever-renewed love; there is the silly theft of Nature, who must needs borrow the hues of my lady to paint her roses and lilies; there is the inevitable comparison of love with a living death; rocks, woods, hills, and streams are witnesses to so many plaintive despairs that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together; Echo retorts upon a querulous lover in sonnet after sonnet; a hundred times we read, "I burn yet am I cold, I am a-cold yet burn," and a thousand times we hear the cry, "Give me my heart, for no man liveth heartless." To be sure the ideas are often combined differently in these pilfered repetitions, but the disguise is transparent.

My heart mine eye accuseth of his death,

writes Constable, borrowing from Petrarch and a long line of Petrarchists. Then follows Drayton with his

> Whilst yet mine Eyes do surfeit with delight
> My woeful heart (imprisoned in my breast),

and Griffin with his

> Oft have mine eyes, the agents of mine heart
> (False traitor eyes conspiring my decay !)—

nor did Shakespeare himself disdain the time-worn theme. After reading much in these sonnet-sequences one feels as if he had visited that celebrated chamber in the academy of Lagado, where honest Gulliver beheld the project for improving knowledge by practical and mechanical operations. The Petrarchian tags are pasted on the wooden dice of the frame ; at a word from the professor the handles are turned, the bits of wood are shifted about, and in the twinkling of an eye a new sonnet stands before you in all the majesty of meaningless rhetoric. There is a delightful facility about the whole affair, but somehow you are more interested in the process than in the results.

Macaulay, in one of his essays, denounces Petrarch as the malign power of Italian literature, whose influence was always set against the better tradition of Dante, as Ahriman was opposed to Ormuzd. What would he have said had he known the extent of that Ahrimanian malady in

English letters as well? One can imagine him perusing those three hundred thousand sonnets of the sixteenth century and tabulating the complicated plagiarisms with that serene assurance which only a critic of his capacious memory could assume. Those who have penetrated but a little way into that jungle of delights, and boast a more modest grasp of mind, may be content to trace the main currents of tradition in our English sonnets and let the details go by. And in doing this they will, perhaps, not miss the truer pleasure. Petrarch, of course, lies at the bottom of the whole sonneteering mania; there is the *ab Jove* from which any consideration of the subject must start. But Petrarch himself is not a simple apparition. In him first of all the currents of the old world and the new met together, and it is a matter of nice discrimination to determine what part of his work is inspired directly by the classics and how far he merely continues the tradition of the middle ages. As I have reread his sonnets for this occasion, it has seemed to me that too much of his inspiration is commonly attributed to the reawakened enthusiasm of the Renaissance for the masters of Greece and Rome. No doubt his style and imagery are largely Latin; he has put on the fair habit of the ancient poets, but still, underneath, the passion and the features of the man are of the Christian world. His real innovation, so far as substance goes, was the completeness with which he welded into a compound of rare beauty the two mediæval

ideals of love. The religious books of the preceding centuries had been filled with bitter diatribes against women, and with lamentations over the subjection of man to feminine seduction. From this source, more than from the *odi et amo* of the Roman poets, sprang the woes and outcry of Petrarch's muse.

> Had I believed that death would loose the girth
> Of amorous cares that drag me to the ground,
> How long ago these hands the way had found
> For weary limbs and burden under earth,

he writes in one of the early sonnets, and it requires but a little knowledge of letters to discover in this trepidation of grief a note purely Christian and unknown to the pagan poets. Whatever is added to the mediæval spirit is that peculiar self-consciousness which is not classic but marks the beginning of the modern world.

With this feeling of subjection that cannot free itself from shame, Petrarch combines the other mediæval tendency which idealised woman as the symbol of the purer and more spiritual life. That tendency, familiar enough in the romances of chivalry and in the Mariolatry of the Church to need no explanation, found its highest expression in the *Amor sementa in voi d'ogni virtute* of the poet who preceded Petrarch. In Dante, indeed, this idealism is pure and almost unmixed, too pure to find imitators among the very worldly visionaries of the Renaissance; it needed the

composite genius of a Petrarch so to temper mediæval ideals with mediæval realism and then to clothe these sentiments in such a garb of classical imagery as to establish the conception of love for centuries. Nor is the result of this union in the great Italian himself as disparate or as unreal as might be supposed. Whether it be the exquisite vehicle of his style or some fine heat of the poet's temperament, or, more likely, both of these together—whatever be the cause, the sonnets and *canzoni*, which of late years have found so few admirers, impress me as the genuine utterance of a man in whom personal emotions and abstract reflections and a sensuous perception of natural beauties were so intimately bound together that their confusion in his verse produces the effect of a necessary and beautiful sincerity. The emotion itself was not single and so may seem insincere; the expression corresponds to an actual experience and state of mind.

Such is the basis of that vast literature of which the works of the French Pleiad are, on the whole, the most vital and genial, and our English Elizabethan sonnets the least tolerable parts. Of the mere copied agonies and despairs that rose from Albion we need not stay to speak. How well it would have been if the lamenting lovers had heeded the admonition of their leader and master, Sidney:

> You that do dictionary's method bring
> Into your rhymes running in rattling rows;

You that poor Petrarch's long deceasèd woes
With newborn sighs and denizened wit do sing:
You take wrong ways!

And how often the rebuke of the same poet is brought to mind:

"Fool!" said my Muse, "look in thy heart and write!"

Again, to show by examples in what way these amatory lovers imitated the Petrarchian idealism, making of their lady the symbol and quintessence of beauty and truth, would be to quote the better part of Mr. Lee's two volumes. As a single specimen of their manner I might cite Lodge's sixth sonnet to Phillis, were it not that his language here is a shade too luscious for our chaster days. The eighth sonnet (so-called; it has only twelve lines) of the same series may stand in its place:

No stars her eyes to clear the wandering night,
But shining suns of true divinity,
That make the soul conceive her perfect light!
No wanton beauties of humanity
Her pretty brows, but beams that clear the sight
Of him that seeks the true philosophy!
No coral is her lip, no rose her fair,
But even that crimson that adorns the sun.
No nymph is she, but mistress of the air,
By whom my glories are but new begun.
But when I touch and taste as others do,
I then shall write, and you shall wonder too.

But though the basis of this literature is true Petrarchism, there are elements imported from

the French school and from direct reading of the classics which give it at times a character of its own. We catch here and there, for instance, an echo of genuine Platonism, such as is rarely to be found in the writers of the Continent. I say *genuine* Platonism, because too often we forget to discriminate between that spirit and the Petrarchian love, which may be ideal, but is certainly not Greek. Yet the distinction is fairly simple. Love, to Plato, was a dæmonic power lying between our mortality and the things of the spirit; and the vision of earthly beauty works a divine madness in the soul that lifts the beholder at last quite out of the sphere of human desires into the contemplation of eternal truth. There is no room here for that kind of symbolism which raised the dead Laura to be the poet's ruling mistress in the sky. You cannot conceive of Plato either sighing to be delivered from the dominion of her beauty in the flesh, or worshipping her after death as a divinity:

> E viva e bella e nuda al ciel salita,
> Indi mi signoreggia, indi mi sforza.

When Daniel says of his Delia,

> Chastity and beauty, which were deadly foes,
> Live reconcilèd friends within her brow,

he is employing a sentiment which is primarily Petrarchian, and which might without straining be called Platonic also. But the two ideals soon

diverge. The mark of mediæval idealism is the endeavour to carry the conception of personality into the realm of the infinite ; Platonic love leaves the personal element behind in its heavenly ascent. The attempt to make of Beatrice a guide in the spiritual life would have seemed to the Greek a sentimental sacrilege. Perhaps the finest expression of the symbolism which derives from the middle ages through Petrarch and is so commonly confused with Platonic love, may be found in one of the two or three great sonnets in the *Amoretti* of Spenser :

> One day I wrote her name upon the strand,
> But came the waves and washed it quite away ;
> Again I wrote it with a second hand,
> But came the tide and made my pains his prey.
>
> Vain man, said she, that dost in vain assay
> A mortal thing so to immortalise ;
> For I myself shall like to this decay,
> And eke my name be wipèd out, likewise.
>
> Not so, quoth I, let baser things devise
> To die in dust, but you shall live by fame ;
> My verse your virtues rare shall eternise,
> And in the heavens write your glorious name.
>
> Where, whenas death shall all the world subdue,
> Our love shall live and later life renew.

That is the idealism of the Petrarchist at its best, the hope that his love shall somehow survive mortality and mingle with eternal things. But now and then another note breaks through—the

true Platonism, nay, the true philosophy that may be found in Christian and Oriental meditations, and wherever the perception of life's illusion suddenly smites upon the eyes. You will not hear it in Petrarch, but, in Christianised form, it makes the theme of Sidney's noblest lines:

> Leave me, O love! which reachest but to dust!
> And thou, my mind! aspire to higher things!
> Grow rich in that which never taketh rust!
> Whatever fades, but fading pleasure brings.
>
> Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
> To that sweet yoke, where lasting freedoms be!
> Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light
> That doth both shine and give us sight to see.
>
> O take fast hold! Let that light be thy guide!
> In this small course which birth draws out to death:
> And think how evil becometh him to slide
> Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath!
>
> Then farewell, world! Thy uttermost I see!
> Eternal Love, maintain Thy love in me!

There is doubtless a different note in this from the love which forms the background of Sidney's as of all these other sonnets, yet the change does not jar acutely on the mind; we pass from one to the other with a certain freedom, for after all they both lie in the field of the ideal. But another element has entered into the Elizabethan sonnets, which is utterly discordant with their Petrarchian basis, and which does much to produce the feeling of vacuity and insincerity inhering in them. I

mean the Anacreontic vein, which spread through the writings of the Pleiad after the publishing of the pseudo-Anacreon by Stephanus in 1554, and passed thence into England. To Plato, as to all the great writers of the early age, "Eros, the son, Aphrodite, was a mighty god," and as such he appeared to Dante and Petrarch. To attempt any fusion or juxtaposition of this great divinity, "fairest among all the immortal gods," as Hesiod calls him, with the laughing, mischievous boy of decadent Greece and Rome, was to show that inveracity of imagination which renders a work cold and meaningless. I do not mean to condemn the Anacreontic poems in themselves. Many of them in their airy Greek form are exquisite trifles. That translucent little gem of Cupid and the bee, for instance, not even Tom Moore could vulgarise in his translation, and we recognise its grace in Spenser's paraphrase:

> Upon a day, as Love lay sweetly slumb'ring.

There is something perfectly legitimate, even charming, in the use of these delicate fancies in the proper place and in the proper metre, as when the same poet fashions this pretty conceit:

> I saw, in secret to my Dame
> How little Cupid humbly came,
> And said to her: "All hayle, my mother!"
> But when he saw me laugh, for shame
> His face with bashful blood did flame,
> Not knowing Venus from the other.

That is well enough in a way, but any one can see how the introduction of such trifling into the idealism of Petrarchian love, with its life of melancholy abstinence and its visions of eternity, must mar and distort the fair image of truth. Nor is it an answer to say that each sonnet must be judged by itself, and that there is no discordance if we read Sidney's Platonic abstinence on one page and Barnes's Anacreontic fancies on another. In the first place, the very form of the sonnet, with the noble gravity of its rhymes, is totally unfit for these light themes, and further, these sonnets all spring so manifestly from the same source and breathe so completely the same atmosphere that it is fair to criticise them as a single literary production. Indeed, Sidney himself was half-conscious of this confusion between the worship of the true Eros and the sportive dalliance with the Anacreontic Erotion or Cupid, and expresses it more than once. Out of this consciousness there does even arise a kind of subtle reconciliation, as in the eleventh sonnet:

> In truth, O Love! with what a boyish kind
> Thou dost proceed in thy most serious ways;
> That when the heaven to thee his best displays,
> Yet of that best thou leav'st the best behind.
>
> For like a child, that some fair book doth find,
> With gilded leaves or coloured vellum plays,
> Or, at the most, on some fair picture stays,
> But never heeds the fruit of writer's mind;

So, when thou saw'st in Nature's cabinet
Stella, thou straight lookt'st babies in her eyes,
In her cheek's pit thou didst thy pitfold set,

And in her breast bo-peep or crouching lies,
Playing and shining in each outward part;
But, fool, seek'st not to get into her heart.

But oftener Petrarch and Anacreon are jostled together in such a manner as to make the former look not a little undignified and the latter heavy. Thus in Barnes's *Parthenophil* there is a sonnet to Content, which may be quoted entire for the serenity and strength of its noble lines:

Ah, sweet Content! where is thy mild abode?
Is it with shepherds and light-hearted Swains,
Which sing upon the downs and pipe abroad,
Tending their flocks and cattle on the plains?

Ah, sweet Content! where dost thou safely rest?
In heaven, with angels? which the praises sing
Of Him that made, and rules at His behest,
The minds and hearts of every living thing.

Ah, sweet Content! where doth thine harbour hold?
Is it in churches, with Religious Men,
Which please the gods with prayers manifold;
And in their studies meditate it then?

Whether thou dost in heaven or earth appear,
Be where thou wilt! Thou wilt not harbour here!

Barring the flat lines (the eleventh and twelfth), which have a way of stumbling into the very best of these sonnets, that is an excellent piece of work;

but how disastrously the bland effect of it is dispelled when the eye drops to the verses next succeeding:

> If Cupid keep his quiver in thine eye, etc.

It is such incongruities as these that point to the shallowness and falseness of this whole procedure. In fact, we must recognise that these sonnets show Elizabethan literature almost at its lowest, and that is low indeed. England has always lacked art, and the lack was greater perhaps in those licensed days than at any subsequent period. Give the greater men of that age an exquisite fancy to dandle or some swift emotion to utter in lyric form where the first impulse of genius is sufficient; let them have some overriding passion or extravagant humour to unfold in a drama whose looseness of structure imposes no restraint, and they will bring forth effects incomparable for freshness and penetrating beauty. But put on them the habit of a stricter art, bid them confine their expression to a mould where form and conscious style are essential, and immediately they sprawl and are helplessly confounded. How little sense of form they had is made evident by their habit of ending the Italianate sonnet with a couplet; that trivial error in technique is vastly significant. How frigid and unreal their sentiment became under constraint may be seen by comparing their work with the better productions of the Pleiad from whom they stole so unblush-

ingly. Read through Mr. Lee's two volumes from end to end, and you will not find a single sonnet which voices the passion and pathos of fading beauty, so genuine to the Renaissance, as in Ronsard's "Quand vous serez bien vieille, au soir, à la chandelle"; nor will you meet with anything comparable to this other sonnet of Ronsard's whereinto the very essence of the age, with its love of books and love of woman, seems to be distilled:

Je veux lire en trois jours l'Iliade d'Homere,
Et pour ce, Corydon, ferme bien l'huis sur moy:
Si rien me vient troubler, je t'assure ma foy,
Tu sentiras combien pesante est ma colere.

Je ne veux seulement que nostre chambrière
Vienne faire mon lit, ton compagnon, ny toy;
Je veux trois jours entiers demeurer à requoy,
Poor follastrer, après, une sepmaine entiere.

Mais si quelqu'un venoit de la part de Cassandre,
Ouvre-luy tost la porte, et ne le fais attendre;
Soudain entre ma chambre, et me vien accoustrer.

Je veux tant seulement à luy seul me monstrer:
Au reste, si un dieu vouloit pour moy descendre
Du ciel, ferme la porte, et ne le laisse entrer.

But I would not force the note of criticism. Some six or eight of Sidney's pieces and here and there a single sonnet in the other collections stand out with a beauty or simple realism all the more remarkable for the surrounding waste. Several of these I have quoted, but it will have been

observed that even in these there almost invariably creeps in a line or quatrain or badly hung couplet that does much to mar the effect of the whole. Only one sonnet occurs to me whose tone is perfectly sustained from the first word to the last, and that is Drayton's famous *jeu d'esprit*, "Since there 's no help, come, let us kiss and part," for which, happily, Mr. Lee has found no model in foreign tongues. Aside, too, from these notable exceptions, there are little groups within the larger sequences, such as some of the earlier sonnets in Lodge's *Phillis*, which are written with a kind of lusciousness soothing to the ear, though they may leave the mind and heart untouched. And then not even these imitators of an imitation could spin verses in those ebullient days without chancing occasionally upon a line or quatrain that breaks through their dull convention, like the song of a bird piercing suddenly the monotonous undertone of the woods. It may be an effect of resonant melody found in the words alone and not in the sense, as where Barnes, after the usual frigid conceit,

> These mine heart-eating eyes do never gaze,

adds magniloquently,

> Upon thy sun's harmonious marble wheels;

it may be an image of high splendour such as this metaphor in the same poet,

> And Phœbe carried in her amber couch;

it may be Drayton's visionary Platonism,

> Even as a man that in some trance hath seen
> More than his wondering utterance can unfold,
> That, rapt in spirit, in better worlds hath been;
> So must your praise distractedly be told;

—whatever the note be, when it strikes unexpectedly on the ear, we pause in our reading and know that this poet, too, like Daniel, has for a little while, and in spite of the convention that hampers him, been in the company of that "clear-eyed Rector of the holy Hill." This, perhaps, is the most obvious pleasure to be got from going through these all too similar sonnet-sequences. Another satisfaction they have, of a negative nature to be sure: they show more distinctly by way of contrast the reality and emotional veracity which remove the greater part of Shakespeare's sonnets to a class by themselves. But of this another time.

## SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

HOWEVER disappointing the mass of Elizabethan sonnets in Mr. Sidney Lee's two volumes may have been, one great service at least they have performed: by contrast they have thrown the realism and human passion of Shakespeare's sonnets into a new and bold relief. They serve as a touchstone, so to speak, by means of which it is possible to tell with a kind of critical precision just where Shakespeare was juggling with the conventional commonplaces of the Renaissance, as not seldom happened, and where, on the contrary, he wrote from actual experience or native emotion. And no one, I think, can come back to these more personal sonnets after a perusal of Mr. Lee's collection without being impressed anew by the miracle of their beauty and without feeling that with this key the poet did veritably unlock his heart.

Not that they contain any rationalised philosophy or any formula of life; on the contrary, their value as a confession is bound up with the very fact that they spring directly from the experience of the writer without any attempt to shape that experience into a system after the manner of the

more reflective artists. And in this they are in harmony with the spirit of the plays. I am aware of the peril of such a statement to-day, when it has become the exercise of a certain class of perfervid critics to read into the dramas some favoured idea, whether political or religious or moral or literary. Yet withal the very difficulties and contradictions that arise from the methodical interpretation of Shakespeare might have warned them that no such application of philosophy was possible. We take recourse to Matthew Arnold's saying, "Others abide our question, thou art free," or, we quote from Lord Lytton:

> Each guess of others into worlds unknown
> Shakespeare revolves, but keeps concealed his own;
> As in the Infinite hangs poised his thought,
> Surveying all things and asserting nought;—

but few of us have the courage to admit that he evades our questioning just because he has no answer to give. It is with him as with the oracles of which a skeptical poet has made complaint—

> That none can pierce the vast black veil uncertain,
> Because there is no light beyond the curtain.

We may find the whole gamut of human emotion in Shakespeare, but we begin to darken counsel with words when we undertake to construct out of the medley of his plots any coherent

vision of life such as exists in Milton or Homer or Dante or Æschylus. Other dramatists have resorted for their tragic thesis to some definite philosophy, whether of their own eliciting or of the age—to the antinomy of fate and the individual will, or the clashing of family and state, or the conflict of duty and pleasure. Shakespeare proceeds otherwise: simple passion is his theme, and his tragic exaltation is obtained by magnifying passion until it assumes the enormity of a supernatural obsession and the bearer is shattered by the excess of his own emotion. No one can have failed to observe the incongruity of the *dénouement* in most of the tragedies—the accumulated and unmeaning slaughters that bring an end to *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Lear*. The simple fact is that these gruesome conclusions, twist and turn as the system-mongers will, do not grow out of any necessity of the plot, but are the relics of a barbarous taste. The real climax lies in the frenzy of the passion-driven hero, and it is for this reason that madness forms an essential part of the greater dramas.

In this sense *Lear* may be taken as the most typical of Shakespeare's tragedies, where the very winds and clouds re-echo the hurly-burly of overwrought passion. And the summit of that passion, I think, is to be found in those scenes before Gloucester's castle and in Edgar's hovel, when the King and his little band set the world topsy-turvy with the unrestrained wildness of their

pathos and mockery, through which passes Lear's cry of terror: "Oh, that way madness lies!" On the contrary, the formal conclusion of the play has no consistence in reason, and, aside from the separate passages of striking poetry, little art. The needless intrigues and the universal butchery bear no logical relation to the main theme and degrade the artistic enjoyment of the hearer. The interest of the piece lies in the excess of passion and not in any unravelling of a tragic nodus; it is a drama of character and not of plot.

And it is the same with the other plays. As the stuff of life presents itself to Shakespeare, broken and unarranged, so he reflects it in his magnifying mirror—a tale full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. I remember one warm evening in early spring standing with a friend on a balcony that overlooked the lights and the throbbing procession of Broadway. It was the hour when the theatres were closing. The scene was new to him, for he had come from a far Western town, and the odour of the city, the constant mutations of the throng, the snatches of conversation, and the occasional laughter that floated above the murmur—the mystery of this boundless activity, caught in passing glimpses, acted on his nerves as an intoxicant. It fascinated and troubled him at once; he could find no answer to the appeal of this enormous, ebullient life, and he was haunted by the feeling that each human atom of the mass was driven along in the current by

some desire inexplicable to all the others—inexplicable, it might be, to himself. The whole spectacle presented itself to the eye as a tangle of passions woven on a web of illusion. "It is all new to me," he said, "yet the sensation is strangely familiar. How does it come?" And then, after a pause: "I understand. It is the world of Shakespeare, as we have just seen it on the stage. And often before, while reading his plays, I have been overwhelmed by the same feeling of infinite interacting lives and infinite illusion." And my friend knew his Shakespeare as few of us know him in these laborious days.

Only there is something to add. Though Shakespeare did not rationalise, or, in a sense, translate the events of life into an artistic design, though he gives back the crude material of emotion as he finds it, yet in another way he did have his own solution of the riddle—it may even be that his solution is, when all is said, profounder and more satisfying than that of any other poet. The passions of his play may be knit into an inextricable tangle so that no dramatic unravelling is possible, yet always when the emotion is wrought to a height beyond which human nature cannot go, always when the hearer is about to cry out, "That way madness lies; let me shun that," suddenly the poet waves aside the whole fabric of enchantment with a word of royal command. From the fitful fever of life, in the turning of a moment, he carries us into that region of

eventual calm wherefrom the stage of the world seems as a little point at a mighty distance. He who created this troubled scene is no longer a partaker in its passionate perplexities; he stands a great way off, apart from it and above it, and looks down where, far beneath,

> . . . the tides of day and night
> With flame and darkness ridge
> The void, as low as where this earth
> Spins like a fretful midge.

We need not dwell on this aspect of his genius, though we may animadvert, by the way, that Taine's criticism, because it fails to recognise this other element beside the passion of Shakespeare, is finally false and shallow. Any one will recall the great moments when the curtain of disillusion falls. It is Hamlet's "The rest is silence"; or the Dauphin's "Life is as tedious as a twice-told tale Vexing the dull ear of a drowsy man"; or the Second Richard's "A brittle glory shineth in this face"; or Macbeth's "To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow"; or Kent's "Vex not his ghost"; or Prospero's "We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep." More than that, there would seem to be something akin to this inner peripeteia in the development of Shakespeare's genius. The peculiar calm and beauty of *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and the other late plays have often been commented upon. After the tumult

of the great tragedies, those scenes of idyllic sport come like the words of Macbeth,

> There 's nothing serious in mortality,
> All is but toys——

as if the poet, finding no significance in the thwarted fates of mankind, had turned at last to the laughter of young girls and the innocence of flowers.

No, we merely deceive ourselves if we go to Shakespeare for any philosophic systematising of life or any reshaping of the material afforded by experience into a world of artistic significance, such as we look for in the masters of Greek and French literature. What we do get from him is a sense of boundless life. Other men have suffered and enjoyed privately, but in him were brought together all the passions of mankind; he is the master of human experience, and there can come to us no pinnacle of triumph or despair, of joy or grief, no tragic melancholy or buoyant humour, no envy or hate or love or pride or shame, but we shall know that he on some day of his brief life has felt as we feel and has spoken for us better than we ourselves can speak. And so it is, I think, that we hunger for some direct word from this poet, some revelation of his own mind, more than from any other writer of the world. What had he to say of his passage through time? Was the sum of it sweet or bitter to him; did he find it a simple matter to live, or was he, too, *infelix fatis*

*exterritus;* did he, in the sessions of silent thought, regard with complacence his contact with daily life, or was there in his memory still some touch of regret—even of shame? Just because there is here no remoulding of experience to an ideal, we believe that if he should open his heart to us in these matters he would exhibit a peculiar frankness; and because his experience was broader and deeper than that of any other man, we feel that his word would have extraordinary validity. Could Shakespeare confess, it would be, as it were, a confession of the human race.

And to a certain extent Shakespeare has confessed. I am not so rash as to suppose that here and now we shall pluck out the heart of his mystery; in the end a man of his wide-reaching vision must remain as his own Æneas says: "The secrets of nature have not more gift in taciturnity." Yet no one can compare his sonnets with those in Mr. Lee's volumes without being immediately impressed by the directness of the self-revelation they contain, nor can I conceive any reason for taking this confession otherwise than at its face value. And what has he to say for himself—this man who ran through the gamut of human emotions and made himself as it were the spokesman of the race? Alas, it is only the old story repeated. I do not see how one can read these sonnets and not feel that the sum of life to the poet of those spacious days was, as it had appeared to the Preacher of Israel long ago, *Vanity and vexa-*

*tion, and he that increaseth experience increaseth sorrow!* Not seldom, to be sure, there is a note of serenity or triumph, but always there is this peculiarity, that the more personal the tone becomes the sadder is its import.

He was, after all, a child of his age. There was always present with him that sense of the eternal flux of things which is so characteristic of the Renaissance, but which, curiously enough, rarely appears in the other Elizabethan sonneteers, however common it may be in the dramatists. It is safe to say that no single motive or theme recurs more persistently through the whole course of Shakespeare's works than this consciousness of the servile depredations of time, that "ceaseless lackey to eternity." As with other men of the period, this sense of brevity and mutability lay upon his mind like an obsession, and no small part of the tragic pathos in his plays arises from the jostling together of the insatiable desires of youth with the ever imminent perception of evanescence. One wonders whether Bacon could have had in recollection these apostrophes to time when he wrote in his *Essays:* "It is not good to look too long upon these turning-wheels of vicissitude, lest we become giddy."

Of the great passages in the dramas which revert to this theme I need say nothing, for they are fresh in the memory of us all. But it is just as prominent, though possibly less familiar, in the poems. In the very midst of Lucrece's agony

she forgets herself awhile to rail against this power that "turn[s] the giddy round of Fortune's wheel":

> Mis-shapen Time, copesmate of ugly Night,
> Swift subtle post, carrier of grisly care!

And in the *Venus and Adonis* the thought, here in its milder aspect, is still more essential.

> The tender spring upon thy tempting lip
> Shews thee unripe yet mayst thou well be tasted;
> Make use of time, let not advantage slip;
> Beauty within itself should not be wasted:
> Fair flowers that are not gathered in their prime
> Rot and consume themselves in little time—

cries Venus to the reluctant youth, and the real charm of this first heir of Shakespeare's invention resides in a young poet's pity for what Freneau long afterwards was to call "the frail duration of a flower," and in his longing to conquer mutability by the prowess of love:

> Seeds spring from seeds and beauty breedeth beauty.

We are carried by this theme immediately to the earlier sonnets of the collection in which Shakespeare scolds his boy friend for cherishing an "unthrifty loveliness":

> Thy unused beauty must be tombed with thee.

So striking is the resemblance between these first seventeen sonnets and this part of the *Venus and*

*Adonis* just alluded to that the poem would seem to be a mere dramatisation or objectification (if I may use the repellent word) of the more personal expression of the idea, and would afford pretty strong confirmation of the opinion that the early sonnets, at least, were written about the year 1593 (the date of *Venus and Adonis*) and were addressed to that Earl of Southampton to whom the poem was dedicated. Everything, too,—both the habit of poets in those days and the unmistakable continuity of thought running through the greater number of Shakespeare's series,—would indicate that the succeeding sonnets were meant for the same person, although some of them may have been written considerably later. Even in the more tragic part that was to come afterwards, when the hesitant friend accepted Shakespeare's advice quite too literally, he turns the theme of the *Venus and Adonis* to the culprit's exoneration:

> Gentle thou art, and therefore to be won,
> Beauteous thou art, therefore to be assailed;
> And when a woman woos what woman's son
> Will sourly leave her till she have prevailed?

Indeed, it might be a question whether the dramatisation of the subject was undertaken to confirm the earlier exhortation, or later, when the turning point of the sonnet-story occurred, to uphold the example of Adonis to the tempted, wavering youth. In either case the sonnets of both periods and the poem would seem to be

written under the same inspiration and not far apart in time.

Nor is it really so difficult to explain, theoretically, the mood in which Shakespeare wrote those earlier exhortations as the mountainous controversy over them would lead one to suppose. Consider that this ambitious young poet had come up to London with a hunger for beauty unequalled perhaps in the history of literature; and that with this hunger went the haunting consciousness of the uncertainty and mutability of things which was a part also of this Renaissance inheritance. Naturally when, in the years following the first riot of youth, he fell under the sway of the noble boy, at once his patron and his love (whether it was Southampton or another) — naturally this perilous perception of beauty with its poignant regret threw an ideal colour over their friendship. And by virtue of that mingling together in England of the currents of the Renaissance and the Reformation, Shakespeare's passion for the boy took on something of the sensuousness of that relation as it was adopted in Italy from classical tradition and at the same time the moral *pudor* of the northern races. The result is thus easily explained in theory, but to most readers of to-day the realisation of this mixed sentiment is not a little baffling; the sonnets would probably leave them quite cold were it not that Shakespeare's confession deals also with larger matters. His love for the youth becomes, in fact, a beautiful

symbol of that war against Time which runs through all his work. In this respect the fifteenth sonnet may be regarded as the keynote of the whole first group, although in poetic diction it cannot be ranked among the highest:

> When I consider everything that grows
> Holds in perfection but a little moment,
> That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows,
> Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;
> When I perceive that men as plants increase,
> Cheerèd and checked even by the self-same sky,
> Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,
> And wear their brave state out of memory;
> Then the conceit of this inconstant stay
> *Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,*
> *Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay,*
> To change your day of youth to sullied night;
> *And all in war with Time for love of you,*
> As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

He looks back to "the chronicle of wasted time," and is filled with alarm that the grace and nobility of his young friend also "among the wastes of time must go." Aided probably by some family circumstances now quite obscure to us, he appeals to the "sweet boy" to defy the heavy hand of age by the creative faculty of love, and finds it easy to write this appeal with the constant revolt of his own nature against the reign of mutability. And when, as it appears, the malicious youth let his exhortations fall unheeded, or heeded them in a manner quite foreign to the preacher's intention and desire, it was still within the range of his

Renaissance training to seek to accomplish by the power of his own art what the other had failed to acquire for himself. He will eternise in his verse this "flow'ring pride, so fading and so fickle" (to use Spenser's phrase on mutability), and so put back the encroachments of decay; he is but one of many in those days who sought the "stedfast rest of all things" in such an *ære perennius*. And it soon grows evident that in the sonnets which express this hope the sense of universal vicissitude has almost driven from view his concern for the particular W. H., if those were the friend's initials:

> When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced
> The rich proud cost of outworn buried age,
> When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed
> And brass eternal slave to mortal rage; . . .

or turning to man's estate—

> Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
> So do our minutes hasten to their end;
> Each changing place with that which goes before,
> In sequent toil all forwards do contend; . . .
> And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,
> Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

It is only in this way, I think, by connecting Shakespeare's love for this chosen boy with the deeper current of his thought and feeling that we can understand, in part at least, the riddle of the sonnets.

But, after all, this restiveness under the hand of time, however personally expressed by Shakespeare and however strangely omitted by his compatriot sonneteers, was a commonplace of his age —of all ages poetically inspired, from Homer's "Like as the generations of leaves" down to Keats's "Forever wilt thou love and she be fair." It is possible to go beyond this in the sonnets, and to catch a note of sadness which is by no means a "topic" of the age, which is indeed now and again almost painfully intimate and individual. I am aware of the temerity of such a statement, but, taken as a whole and with all their splendours considered, these sonnets to me seem to join with the plays in forming one of the saddest human documents ever penned. There is of course humour here in abundance; but from the days of Aristophanes to the present time humour has had a strange trick of springing luxuriantly from a bitter soil. It is common also to point to the pastoral scenes in *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale*, and the other later dramas as a proof of the large joyousness and final serenity that lay at the basis of Shakespeare's nature; and in one sense the assertion is perfectly just. Yet here, as always, it is necessary to distinguish. We may not be able to mark off the passages with mathematical precision, but no one can read the plays with such a quest in mind without feeling in a general way that at times the poet is commenting on life in the tone of his own direct experience, and that again

he speaks from that far Olympian height where his own personality is forgotten and wherefrom he looks down upon the business of men as on the pretty sport of children—and then it is that the tricks of Ariel and Miranda's brave new world become a wonder equal to a dukedom, and the breath of a dim violet grows as important as the jealous rage of Leontes. This serenity is due, in part, no doubt, to the calming influence of years, and falls like the wind-swept purity of the atmosphere after a storm; it is no less the gift of genius, with its well-known faculty of dwelling alternately within and without itself.

But our concern to-day is with the poet's inner life alone, and I see no reason to question the common belief that *Hamlet* expresses more of Shakespeare's personal experience than any other play or character. So far as I know, no one has pointed out how strongly that opinion is reinforced by the similarity of tone between the dramatic utterances of *Hamlet* and the confessions of the sonnets. Compare, for instance, the list of evils pronounced by the melancholy Dane:

> The whips and scorns of time,
> The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
> The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
> The insolence of office, and the spurns
> That patient merit of the unworthy takes—

consider how foreign all these details are to the actual situation of Hamlet and how appropriate they are to the fortune of Shakespeare himself;

consider with them the misplaced diatribe of Lucrece:

> The patient dies while the physician sleeps;
> The orphan pines while the oppressor feeds;
> Justice is feasting while the widow weeps;
> Advice is sporting while infection breeds—

and then turn to the sixty-sixth sonnet and see how clearly they express not the mere commonplace lament over the insufficiency of life, but the poet's own very personal and very bitter experience:

> Tired with all these for restful death I cry.

Indeed, as we read over the sonnets and mark the lines where he speaks his own relation to the whips and scorns of time, we may well be overwhelmed by the magnitude and the intimacy of the confession, and it is easy to understand why he never gave this work willingly to the public as he did his only other two non-dramatic poems. The one word that occurs to me as expressive of his feeling is *indignity;* if it were not for the sound of the word in connection with so revered a name I should say *shame*—indignity against the soilure that is forced upon him from contact with the world, shame for his too facile yielding to contamination. The story is best told by bringing together some of these passages without comment:—

Sonnet 29:

> When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
> I all alone beweep my outcast state.

Sonnet 36:
I may not evermore acknowledge thee,
Lest my bewailèd guilt should do thee shame.

Sonnet 37:
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite.

Sonnet 88:
Upon my part I can set down a story
Of faults concealed, wherein I am attainted.

Sonnet 90:
Now, while the world is bent my deeds to cross,
Join with the spite of fortune, make me bow.

Sonnet 112:
Your love and pity doth the impression fill
Which vulgar scandal stamped upon my brow.

Sonnet 119:
What potions have I drunk of Siren tears,
Distilled from limbecs foul as hell within.

Sonnet 121:
'T is better to be vile than vile esteemed.

These are only a few of the lines that might be quoted. Take them all together and I do not believe you will find, in the whole course of English literature, any confession comparable to them for the indignity and shame of a noble spirit outraged by the familiarity of "sluttish Time." Something of this is due, no doubt, to the peculiar position of the actor in those days. Says Casca, when he wishes to pull the great Cæsar down into the mire of common buffeted humanity: "If the tag-rag people did not clap him and hiss him

according as he pleased and displeased them, as they use to do the players in the theatre, I am no true man." We do not often, while under the spell of Shakespeare's magic, consider what it must have meant to so sensitive and self-conscious a nature as his to have been exposed to the outrageous approval and disapproval of an Elizabethan audience. The groundlings, we know, paid for the discomfort of their place in the pit by boisterous assertion of their pleasure, and the comments of the nobles who sometimes sat on the stage at the very elbows of the actors must often have been as galling as the jeers of the mob below. The growing sect of the Puritans, too, gave them something worse than contempt. Thus, after the earthquake of 1580, the Lord Mayor of London writes to the Privy Council, April 12th:

When it happened on Sundaie last that some great disorder was committed at the Theatre, I sent for the undershireve of Middlesex to understand the circumstances, to the intent that by myself or by him I might have caused such redresse to be had as in dutie and discretion I might, and therefore did also send for the plaiers to have apered afore me, and the rather because those playes doe make assembles of cittizens and there families of whome I have charge; but forasmuch as I understand that your Lordship, with other of his majesties most honourable Counsell, have entered into examination of that matter, I have surceassed to procede further, and do humbly refer the whole to your wisdomes and grave considerations; howbeit, I have further thought it my dutie to informe your Lordship, and therewith also to beseche to have in your

honourable rememberance, that the players of playes which are used at the Theatre and other such places, and tumblers and such like, are a very superfluous sort of men and of suche facultie as the lawes have disalowed, and their exersise of those playes is a great hinderaunce of the service of God, who hath with His mighty hand so lately admonished us of oure earnest repentance.

Is it strange that Shakespeare should have retreated from London to the quiet of his Stratford home as soon as he was freed from the necessity of serving such a public? More than once he shows in the sonnets how deeply the iron had entered into his heart, and how he felt the reproach of being classed among this "very superfluous sort of men." The chief passages are often quoted:

Alas, 't is true I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offences of affections new;
Most true it is that I have looked on truth
Askance and strangely;—

and, in the following sonnet:

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means which public manners breeds;
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand, etc.

The confession is sufficiently frank and carries us far enough away from the elegant conventionali-

ties that ruled the other Elizabethan sonneteers. It is not entirely pleasant to know that the man we reverence this side—often yonder side—idolatry, could have laid his heart open in this way even in the intimacy of friendship.

But there is a more painful element in the sonnets than mere outcry against the harshness of the guilty goddess. This man, whose knowledge of the heart enabled him, without the synthetic imagination of the other supreme poets, to build up so marvellous a literature, whose sense of passion was so profound that it took the place of tragic conflict in other dramatists—how is it with him when, laying aside the comfortable disguise of masque and cothurnus, he speaks directly for himself? We call him the master of human experience, and that is his honour to-day ; but how was it with him when he stood on the stage of the Globe Theatre, a motley to the view, or indulged in the wanton life of that superfluous sort of men who were his fellows? If the hazard and spite of fortune produced in him a feeling of indignity, the subjection to the wild beast within his own heart left, for a time at least, what can only be called a stamp of shame. It is not necessary to dwell at length on the particular incident which forms the heart of this confession, nor to make any conjectures in regard to the identity and character of that " worser spirit, a woman coloured ill," who was his love "of despair." All that is essential is told only too frankly in the later sonnets.

There are confessions of guilt in English—a plenty of them; but ordinarily these are made after the sinner has reached a state of grace, and when we probe the matter we are likely to find, as in the case of Bunyan, that the remembered enormities were such crimes as bell-ringing and dancing on the green. The peculiarity of Shakespeare's confession is that we see a sensitive soul actually in the toils of evil, which he deplores yet hugs to his breast. It is this association which makes the terrible one hundred and twenty-ninth sonnet unique in English—unique, so far as I know, in any language. Only the conscience of the Puritan united to the libertine fancy of a Cavalier (a phenomenon not easily conceivable outside of England) could have produced those words:

> The expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action. . . .
> All this the world well knows; yet none knows well
> To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

If you wish to see how much of the world's experience has entered into these lines, turn back to Horace's *Epistles* and see in what way the matter presented itself to that clear-eyed pagan.

> Sperne voluptates, nocet empta dolore voluptas,

was the height of his argument, and between that admonition and the anguish of Shakespeare have passed all the middle ages and the whole of Christianity. Or, if you care to set in relief the

personal and intimate nature of the sonnet, compare it with Byron's stanza in *Childe Harold*:

> 'T is an old lesson; Time approves it true,
> And those who know it best, deplore it most;
> When all is won that all desire to woo,
> The paltry prize is hardly worth the cost:
> Youth wasted, minds degraded, honour lost,
> These are thy fruits, successful Passion!

The thought is the same as Shakespeare's, but it is expressed by a man of the world who speaks the wisdom of his kind; there is lacking that individual conviction of sin, as the Puritans whom Shakespeare so despised would have called it.

We must not, however, forget that these sonnets were not written for the world to read, but for the privacy of one or two persons; their enigma would indeed be inexplicable were they intended for the public. And just as Shakespeare's sense of universal vicissitude is the true means of interpreting the opening appeal to the boy friend to perpetuate his beauty through the power of love, so the indignities of his public career, in his early years at least, and the remorse of submission to his own passions are the only explanation of those extravagant terms of admiration and love which he bestows on his young patron.

It is not necessary to believe all the stories of Shakespeare's irregular youth, yet we can hardly doubt that his beginnings in London were humble and not desirable in the eyes of the world. What

he wrung from fortune came by struggle and by coining the experience of his life for public usage. In comparison with his own ragged honours, the brilliant person of such a child of fortune as Southampton would seem to hold as a visible symbol all that he sought and could obtain, if obtained even in part, only by paying for it in the sanctities of his own character. Southampton (or another), beautiful, proud, desired of women, rich, to whom Fortune gave all things without price, was more than a person to Shakespeare, he was an ideal; and the poet's devotion to this patron, his almost cringing submission to a boy's whims, is only comprehensible when we consider the relation between the two in this light. There is in the friendship the vicarious power of transmitting virtues:

> Thy love is better than high birth to me,
> Richer than wealth, prouder than garments' cost,
> Of more delight than hawks or horses be:
> And having thee, of all men's pride I boast.

Almost the association with this ideal of youth is able to cleanse the stains of time. Editors have been troubled by the lines in which Shakespeare speaks of his age—

> That time of year thou mayest in me behold—

and have cited them as proof that the sonnets must have been composed later than 1594, when he was only thirty. They forget that this early

assumption of age was a commonplace of the Renaissance. And, apart from this, it does not appear that the difficulty is solved by making him thirty-six or thirty-eight; even at that age the ordinary man is not quite in the yellow leaf. The fact is that the very intensity of Shakespeare's passions and the depth of his experience made him feel thus old in comparison with one untried by life. And in the freshness of his friend's blossoming he would find a cloak for his own losses at the hand of Time:

> But when my glass shews me myself, indeed,
> Beated and chopt with tanned antiquity,
> Mine own self love quite contrary I read,
> Self so self-loving were iniquity.
> 'T is thee (myself) that for myself I praise
> Painting my age with beauty of thy days.

Yet, even considered in this way, there remains something disconcerting in the peculiar tone of self-humiliation which Shakespeare assumes before a fledgling of the Court. He pays more than the ordinary adulation of the poets in those days, and pays it in a different kind:

> Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
> So far from home into my deeds to prye,
> To find out shames and idle hours in me?

And the triangular comedy, in which Shakespeare and his two loves of comfort and despair play their extraordinary rôles, leaves the poet in a position

not calculated to enhance his honour in the eyes of saint or worldling. Something of this whole relation between the great exemplar of human experience and his boyish patron may be accounted for by the poet's faculty of dramatising the gap in his own nature between ideal and reality ; something of it is still inexplicable, an enigma never meant for our solving, and best, no doubt, left in obscurity.

And if you ask me, then, why I have attempted, so far as I could, to lay bare this darker side of Shakespeare's character, my only reply is that there is a fascination in following out what seems to one the truth. And, after all, some comfort, not of an ignoble sort I trust, abounds in knowing a little more precisely that this spokesman of mankind rose to the power and tranquillity of his vision through experiences very like our own, and that he, too, suffered the indignities of time and the remorse of his own excesses.

## LAFCADIO HEARN

THERE was something almost as romantic in Mr. Hearn's life as in his books. He was, I believe, the child of an Irish father and a woman of the Greek islands; his early manhood he passed in this country, and then converted himself into a subject of the Mikado, taking a Japanese wife and adopting the customs and religion of the land. On his death this winter (1904) he was buried with full Buddhist rites, being the first foreigner so distinguished in Japan; and almost his last act was to pass by cablegram on the final proofs of his most serious attempt to transfer the illusive mystery of the Orient into Western speech. His *Japan, an Interpretation* thus rounded out what must be deemed one of the most extraordinary artistic achievements of modern days. For it is as an art of strange subtlety that we should regard his literary work, an art that, like some sympathetic menstruum, has fused into one compound three elements never before brought together.

In the mere outward manner of this art there is, to be sure, nothing mysterious. One recognises immediately throughout his writing that sense of restraint joined with a power of after-

suggestion, which he has described as appertaining to Japanese poetry, but which is no less his own by native right. There is a term, *ittakkiri*, it seems, meaning "all gone," or "entirely vanished," which is applied contemptuously by the Japanese to verse that tells all and trusts nothing to the reader's imagination. Their praise they reserve for compositions that leave in the mind the thrilling of a something unsaid. "Like the single stroke of a bell, the perfect poem should set murmuring and undulating, in the mind of the hearer, many a ghostly aftertone of long duration." Now these ghostly reverberations are precisely the effect of the simplest of Mr. Hearn's pictures. Let him describe, for instance, the impression produced by walking down the deep cañon of Broadway, between those vast structures, beautiful but sinister, where one feels depressed by the mere sensation of enormous creative life without sympathy and of unresting power without pity,—let him describe this terror of Broadway, and in a few words he shall set ringing within you long pulsations of emotion which reach down to the depths of experience. Or, let him relate by mere allusion the story of hearing a girl say "Good-night" to some one parting from her in a London park, and there shall be awakened in your mind ghostly aftertones that bring back memories of the saddest separations and regrets of life. He employs the power of suggestion through perfect restraint.

But this self-restrained and suggestive style is merely the instrument, the manner, so to speak, of his art. If we examine the actual substance of his writings, we shall discover that it is borrowed from three entirely distinct, in fact almost mutually destructive, philosophies, any one of which alone would afford material for the genius of an ordinary writer. He stands and proclaims his mysteries at the meeting of three ways. To the religious instinct of India,—Buddhism in particular, — which history has engrafted on the æsthetic sense of Japan, Mr. Hearn brings the interpreting spirit of Occidental science; and these three traditions (Hindu, Japanese, and European) are fused by the peculiar sympathies of his mind into one rich and novel compound,— a compound so rare as to have introduced into literature a psychological sensation unknown before. More than any other recent author, he has added a new thrill to our intellectual experience.

Of Japan, which gives the most obvious substratum to Mr. Hearn's work, it has been said that her people, since the days of ancient Greece, are the only genuine artists of the world; and in a manner this is true. There was a depth and pregnancy in the Greek imagination which made of Greek art something far more universally significant than the frail loveliness of Japanese creation, but not the Greeks themselves surpassed, or even equalled, the Japanese in their all-embracing love of decorative beauty. To read the story of

the daily life of these people, as recorded by Mr. Mortimer Menpes and other travellers, is to be brought into contact with a national temperament so far removed from Western comprehension as to seem to most of us a tale from fairyland. When, for instance, Mr. Menpes, with a Japanese friend, visited Danjuro, he found a single exquisite *kakemono*, or painting, displayed in the great actor's chamber. On admiring its beauty, he was told by the friend that Danjuro had taken pains to learn the precise character of his visitor's taste, and only then had exhibited this particular picture. To the Japanese the hanging of a kakemono or the arranging of a bough of blossoms is a serious function of life. The placing of flowers is indeed an exact science, to the study of which a man may devote seven years, even fourteen years, before he will be acknowledged a master. Nature herself is subjected to this elaborate system of training, and often what in a Japanese landscape seems to a foreigner the exuberance of natural growth is really the work of patient human artifice.

There is no accident [writes Mr. Menpes] in the beautiful curves of the trees that the globe-trotter so justly admires: these trees have been trained and shaped and forced to form a certain decorative pattern, and the result is—perfection. We in the West labour under the delusion that if Nature were to be allowed to have her sweet way, she would always be beautiful. But the Japanese have gone much farther than this: they realise

that Nature does not always do the right thing; they know that occasionally trees will grow up to form ugly lines; and they know exactly how to adapt and help her. She is to them like some beautiful musical instrument, finer than any ever made by human hands, but still an instrument, with harmonies to be coaxed out.

And the same æsthetic delicacy, touched with artificiality if you will, pervades the literature of this people. We are accustomed, and rightly, to regard the Japanese as a nation of imitators. But their poetry, we are assured by Mr. Hearn, is the one original art which they have not borrowed from China, or from any other country; and nowhere better than in their poetry can we observe the swiftness and dexterity of their imagination and that exquisite reserve with its haunting echo in the memory. To reproduce in English the peculiar daintiness of these poems is, we are told and can well believe, quite an impossibility; but from the seemingly careless translations scattered through Mr. Hearn's pages we do at least form some notion of their art in the original. Many of these stanzas are mere bits of folk-lore or the work of unknown singers, like this tiny picture of the cicada:

> Lo! on the topmost pine, a solitary cicada
> Vainly attempts to clasp one last red beam of sun.

That is light enough in English, but even one entirely ignorant of the Japanese language can see that, in comparison with the rhythm of the

original,[1] it is like the step of a quadruped compared with the fluttering of a moth. It contains only sixteen syllables in the original; and indeed all these poems are wrought into the brief compass of a stanza, like certain fragile little vases painted inside and out which are so highly prized by connoisseurs. Yet these tiny word-paintings, by virtue of their cunning restraint, are capable at times of gathering into their loveliness echoes of emotion as wide-reaching as love and as deep as the grave:

Perhaps a freak of the wind—yet perhaps a sign of remembrance,—
This fall of a single leaf on the water I pour for the dead.

. . . . . .

I whispered a prayer at the grave: a butterfly rose and fluttered—
Thy spirit, perhaps, dear friend!

To have been able to convey through the coarser medium of English prose something of this æsthetic grace, this deftness of touch, and this suggestiveness of restraint, would in itself deserve no slight praise. But beneath all this artistic delicacy lies some reminiscence of India's austere religious thought, a sense of the nothingness of life strangely exiled among this people of graceful artists, yet still more strangely assimilated by

[1] Sémi hitotsu
Matsu no yū-hi wo
Kakaé-keri.

them ; and this, too, Mr. Hearn has been able to reproduce. We feel this shadow of India's faith lurking in the sunshine of many of the lightest of the stanzas,—a touch of swift exotic poignancy, if nothing more. We feel it still more strongly in such poems as these, which are inspired by the consciousness of endless change and of unceasing birth and death and again birth:

All things change, we are told, in this world of change and sorrow;
But love's way never changes of promising never to change.

. . . . . .

Even the knot of the rope tying our boats together
Knotted was long ago by some love in a former birth.

Endless change, a ceaseless coming and going, and the past throwing its shadow on into the future,—that is the very essence of Hindu philosophy ; but how the tone of this philosophy has itself become altered in passing from the valley of the Ganges to the decorated island of the Mikado! Over and over again Buddha repeats the essential law of being, that all things are made up of constituent parts and are subject to flux and change, that all things are impermanent. It is the *All things pass and nothing abides* of the Greek philosopher, deepened with the intensity of emotion that makes of philosophy a religion. In this ever-revolving wheel of existence one fact only is certain, *karma*, the law of cause and effect which

declares that every present state is the effect of some previous act and that every present act must inevitably bear its fruit in some future state. As a man soweth so shall he reap. We are indeed the creatures of a fate which we ourselves have builded by the deeds of a former life. We are bound in chains which we ourselves have riveted, yet still our desires are free, and as our desires shape themselves, so we act and build up our coming fate, our karma; and as our desires abnegate themselves, so we cease to act and become liberated from the world. Endless change subject to the law of cause and effect—not even our personality remains constant in this meaningless flux, for it too is made up of constituent parts and is dissolved at death as the body is dissolved, leaving only its karma to build up the new personality with the new body. From the perception of this universal impermanence springs the so-called "Truth" of Buddhism, that sorrow is the attribute of all existence. Birth is sorrow, old age is sorrow, death is sorrow, every desire of the heart is sorrow; and the mission of Buddha was to deliver men out of the bondage of this sorrow as from the peril of a burning house. The song of victory uttered by Gotama when the great enlightenment shone upon him, and he became the Buddha, was the cry of a man who has escaped a great evil.

But because the Buddhist so dwells on the impermanence and sorrow of existence, he is not

therefore properly called a pessimist. On the contrary, the one predominant note of Buddhism is joy, for it too is a gospel of glad tidings. The builders who rear these prison houses of life are nothing other than the desires of our own hearts, and these we may control though all else is beyond our power. To the worldly this teaching of Buddha may seem wrapped in pessimistic gloom, for deliverance to them must be only another name for annihilation; but to the spiritually minded it brought ineffable joy, for they knew that deliverance meant the passing out of the bondage of personality into a freedom of whose nature no tongue could speak. It is an austere faith, hardly suited, in its purer form, for the sentimental and vacillating,—austere in its recognition of sorrow, austere in its teaching of spiritual joy.

Yet the wonderful adaptability of Buddhism is shown by its acceptance among the Japanese, certainly of all peoples the most dissimilar in temperament to the ancient Hindus. Here the brooding of the Hindu over the law of impermanence melts into the peculiar sensitiveness to fleeting impressions so characteristic of the Japanese, and the delicacy of their æsthetic taste is enhanced by this half-understood spiritual insight. And it deepens their temperament: I think that the feeling awakened by all these dainty stanzas of something not said but only hinted, that the avoidance of ittakkiri to which Mr. Hearn alludes, the echo-

ing reverberations that haunt us after the single stroke of the bell, are due to the residuum of Hindu philosophy left in these vases of Japanese art. "Buddhism," writes Mr. Hearn, "taught that nature was a dream, an illusion, a phantasmagoria; but it also taught men [men of Japan, he should say] how to seize the fleeting impressions of that dream, and how to interpret them in relation to the highest truth."

Buddhism when it passed over to Japan came into contact with the national religion of Shinto, a kind of ancestor-worship, which proclaimed that the world of the living was directly governed by the world of the dead. On this popular belief the doctrine of karma was readily engrafted, and the two flourished henceforth side by side. Faith in the protecting presence of ancestors and faith in the present efficacy of our own multitudinous preëxistence were inextricably confused. To the Japanese Buddhist the past does not die, but lives on without end, involving the present in an infinite web of invisible influences not easily comprehensible to the Western mind.

And the Indian horror of impermanence and the rapture of deliverance have suffered like transformation with their causes. First of all, the sharp contrast between the horror and the joy is lightened. The sorrow fades to a fanciful feeling of regret for the beauty of the passing moment,—the same regret that speaks through a thousand Western songs such as Herrick's "Gather ye

rosebuds while ye may," and Malherbe's "Et rose elle a vécu ce que vivent les roses," but touched here in Japanese poetry with a little mystery and made more insistent by some echo of Hindu brooding. And the joy, severed from its spiritual sustenance, loses its high ecstasy and becomes almost indistinguishable from regret. Sorrow, too, and joy are impermanent, and the enlightened mind dwells lingeringly and fondly on each fair moment garnered from the waste of Time. Here is no longer the spiritual exaltation, the *dhyâna*, of the Indian monk, but the charmed impressions of the artist. The religion of the Ganges has assumed in Japan the mask of æsthetic emotionalism.

Now this refinement of emotionalism Mr. Hearn by his peculiar temperament has been able to reproduce almost miraculously in the coarser fibre of English. But more specially he has sought to interpret the deeper influence of India on Japan, —the thoughts and images in which we see the subtlety of the Japanese turned aside into a strange new psychology. One may suppose that some tendency to mingle grace and beauty with haunting suggestions was inherent in the Japanese temper from the beginning, but certainly the particular form of imagination that runs through most of the tales Mr. Hearn has translated is not the product of Japan alone. Nor is it purely Hindu: the literature of India includes much that is grotesque but hardly a touch of the weird or

ghostly, for its religious tone is too austere and lacks the suggestive symbolism which that quality demands. Out of the blending of the stern sense of impermanence and moral responsibility with the flower-like beauty of Japan there arises this new feeling of the weird. How intimately the two tempers are blended and how rare their product is, may be seen in such sketches as that called *Ingwa-banashi: A Tale of Karma.*

Had it been that Mr. Hearn's art sufficed only to reproduce the delicacy and haunting strangeness of Japanese tales, he would have performed a notable but scarcely an extraordinary service to letters. But into the study of these byways of Oriental literature he has carried a third element, the dominant idea of Occidental science; and this element he has wedded with Hindu religion and Japanese æstheticism in a union as bewildering as it is voluptuous. In this triple combination lies his real claim to high originality.

Now the fact is well known to those who have studied Buddhism at its genuine sources that our modern conception of evolution fits into Buddhist psychology more readily and completely than into any dogmatic theology of the West. It is natural, therefore, that the Western authors quoted most freely by Mr. Hearn in support of his Oriental meditations should be Huxley and Herbert Spencer. For the most part these allusions to Western science are merely made in passing. But in one essay, that on *The Idea of Preëxistence,*

he endeavours with something of philosophic system to develop the harmony between evolution and the Buddhist conception of previous existences, a conception which, as he shows, has little in common with the crude form of metempsychosis embodied by Wordsworth in such poems as *Fidelity* and *Intimations of Immortality*. To justify his theory he turns to Professor Huxley and quotes these words: "None but very hasty thinkers will reject it on the ground of inherent absurdity. Like the doctrine of evolution itself, that of transmigration has its roots in the world of reality; and it may claim such support as the great argument from analogy is capable of supplying." Again, in his essay on *Nirvâna* he compares the doctrine of impermanence, out of which the conception of Nirvâna springs as a natural corollary, with similar ideas in evolutional science. "Every feeling and thought," so he quotes from Herbert Spencer, "being but transitory; nay, the objects amid which life is passed, though less transitory, being severally in the course of losing their individualities, whether quickly or slowly,—*we learn that the one thing permanent is the Unknowable Reality hidden under all these changing shapes*."

The parallel is at once apt and misleading. In both Oriental faith and Occidental science we do indeed have the conception of all phenomena, including that ultimate phenomenon which we name our personality,—we do indeed have the conception of these as suffering endless flux and change

behind which lies a permanent inexpressible Reality. The parallel so far is close and makes possible the peculiar blending of traditions which, as I have said, is the chief mark of originality in Mr. Hearn's essays. But in the next step the two diverge as far as the rising sun is from the setting. To Mr. Spencer and all the spokesmen of science it is the impermanent sphere of phenomena that is alone knowable, whereas the permanent Reality hidden from the eyes is the great Unknowable. To the Buddhist on the contrary, all impermanence is wrapt in illusion, as indeed the very meaning of the word would seem to imply, whereas the permanent Reality, though inexpressible, is alone knowable. The difference is of great importance when we come to consider the effect of interpreting Japanese ideas in Occidental terms. It even seems that Mr. Hearn himself is not aware of the gulf set between these two methods of viewing existence, and that consequently he has never measured the full originality of this realm of sensation which his art has opened by spanning a bridge between the two. In the fusion of Mr. Hearn's thought the world of impermanent phenomena is at once knowable and unknowable: it is the reality of Western cognition, and therefore is invested with an intensity of influence and fulness of meaning impossible to an Oriental writer; and at the same time it is the unreality of Eastern philosophy, and hence is involved in illusion and subtle shadows into which

it threatens momentarily to melt away. It is a realm of half reality, this phenomenal world, a realm of mingled spirit and matter, seeming now to tantalise the eyes with colours of unimaginable beauty that fade away when we gaze on them too intently, and again to promise the Soul that one long-sought word which shall solve the riddle of her existence in this land of exile. It is a new symbolism that troubles while it illumines. It leads the artist to dwell on the weirder, more impalpable phases of Japanese literature, and to lend to these subconscious motives a force of realism which they could never possess in the original. The perception of impermanence is accompanied with a depth of yearning regret quite beyond the frailer beauty of the songs of the East which could see little gravity of meaning in phenomena dissevered from the spirit, and equally beyond the songs of the West composed before science had carried the law of material mutability into the notion of personality. From this union with science the Oriental belief in the indwelling of the past now receives a vividness of present actuality that dissolves the Soul into ghostly intimacy with the mystic unexplored background of life. As a consequence of this new sense of impermanence and of this new realism lent to the indwelling past, all the primitive emotions of the heart are translated into a strange language, which, when once it lays hold of the imagination, carries us into a region of dreams akin to that world which

our psychologists dimly call the subliminal or subconscious. The far-reaching results of this psychology on literature it is not easy to foresee. Mr. Hearn has nowhere treated systematically this new interpretation of human emotions, but by bringing together scattered passages from his essays we may form some notion of its scope and efficacy.

Beauty itself, which forms the essence of Mr. Hearn's art as of all true art, receives a new content from this union of the East and the West. So standing before a picture of nude beauty we might, in our author's words, question its meaning. That nudity which is divine, which is the abstract of beauty absolute,—what power, we ask, resides within it or within the beholder that causes this shock of astonishment and delight, not unmixed with melancholy? The longer one looks, the more the wonder grows, since there appears no line, or part of a line, whose beauty does not surpass all memory of things seen. Plato explained the shock of beauty as being the Soul's sudden half-remembrance of the World of Divine Ideas: "They who see here any image or resemblance of the things which are there receive a shock like a thunderbolt, and are, after a manner, taken out of themselves." The positive psychology of Spencer declares in our own day that the most powerful of human passions, first love, when it makes its appearance, is absolutely antecedent to all individual experience. Thus do

ancient thought and modern—metaphysics and science—accord in recognising that the first deep sensation of human beauty known to the individual is not individual at all. Must not the same truth hold of that shock which supreme art gives? The emotion of beauty, like all our emotions, is certainly the inherited product of unimaginably countless experiences in an immeasurable past. In every æsthetic sensation is the stirring of trillions of trillions of ghostly memories buried in the magical soil of the brain. And each man carries within him an ideal of beauty which is but an infinite composite of dead perceptions of form, colour, grace, once dear to look upon. It is dormant, this ideal,—potential in essence,—cannot be evoked at will before the imagination; but it may light up electrically at any perception by the living outer sense of some vague affinity. Then is felt that weird, sad, delicious thrill, which accompanies the sudden backward-flowing of the tides of life and time.

So, again, to follow Mr. Hearn, it is easy to infer how this perception of the indwelling of the past gives a wonderful significance to the thraldom of love,—to first love most of all, when the shock of emotion comes untroubled by worldly calculations of the present. What is the glamour, we ask with our author, that blinds the lover in its sweet bewildering light when first he meets the woman of his involuntary choice? Whose the witchcraft? Is it any power in the living idol?

Rather it is the power of the dead within the idolater. The dead cast the spell. Theirs the shock in the lover's heart; theirs the electric shiver that tingled through his veins at the first touch of one girl's hand. We look into the eyes of love and it is as though, through some intense and sudden stimulation of vital being, we had obtained — for one supercelestial moment — the glimpse of a reality never before imagined, and never again to be revealed. There is, indeed, an illusion. We seem to view the divine; but this divine itself, whereby we are dazzled and duped, is a ghost. Our mortal sight pierces beyond the surface of the present into profundities of myriads of years,—pierces beyond the mask of life into the enormous night of death. For a moment we are made aware of a beauty and a mystery and a depth unutterable: then the Veil falls again forever. The splendour of the eyes that we worship belongs to them only as brightness to the morning star. It is a reflex from beyond the shadow of the Now,—a ghost-light of vanished suns. Unknowingly within that maiden-gaze we meet the gaze of eyes more countless than the hosts of heaven,—eyes otherwhere passed into darkness and dust.

And if we turn to another and purer form of love, it is the same force we behold. So long as we supposed the woman soul one in itself,—a something specially created to fit one particular physical being,—the beauty and the wonder of

mother-love could never be fully revealed to us. But with deeper knowledge we must perceive that the inherited love of numberless millions of dead mothers has been treasured up in one life ;—that only thus can be interpreted the infinite sweetness of the speech which the infant hears,—the infinite tenderness of the look of caress which meets its gaze.

So too when we listen to the harmonies of instrumental music or the melody of the human voice, there arises a strange emotion within us which seems to magnify us out of ourselves into some expanse of illimitable experiences, to lift us above the present cares of our petty life into some vast concern—so vast that the soul is lost between the wonderings of divine hope and divine fear. Great music is a psychical storm, agitating to fathomless depths the mystery of the past within us. Or we might say that it is a prodigious incantation. There are tones that call up all ghosts of youth and joy and tenderness ;—there are tones that evoke all phantom pain of perished passion ; —there are tones that resurrect all dead sensations of majesty and might and glory,—all expired exultations,—all forgotten magnanimities. Well may the influence of music seem inexplicable to the man who idly dreams that his life began less than a hundred years ago ! He who has been initiated into the truth knows that to every ripple of melody, to every billow of harmony, there answers within him, out of the Sea of Death and

Birth, some eddying immeasurable of ancient pleasure and pain.

Genius itself, the master of music and poetry and all art that enlarges mortal life, genius itself is nothing other than the reverberation of this enormous past on the sounding board of some human intelligence, so finely wrought as to send forth in purity the echoed tones which from a grosser soul come forth deadened and confused by the clashing of the man's individual impulses.

Is it not proper to say, after reading such passages as these, that Mr. Hearn has introduced a new element of psychology into literature? We are indeed living in the past, we who foolishly cry out that the past is dead. In one remarkable study of the emotions awakened by the baying of a gaunt white hound, Mr. Hearn shows how even the very beasts whom we despise as unreasoning and unremembering are filled with an inarticulate sense of this dark backward and abysm of time, whose shadow falls on their sensitive souls with the chill of a vague dread,—dread, I say, for it must begin to be evident that this new psychology is fraught with meanings that may well trouble and awe the student. In the ghostly residuum of these meditations we may perceive a vision dimly foreshadowing itself which mankind for centuries, nay for thousands of years, has striven half unwittingly to keep veiled. I do not know, but it seems to me that the foreboding of this dreaded disclosure may account for many

things in the obscure history of the race. By reason of this terror the savage trembled before the magician who seemed to have penetrated the mysteries of nature about him. Among the free-hearted Greeks it showed itself in many ways, even in persecutions and deaths, as later among the Christians. It expressed itself mythologically in the haunting legend of Prometheus, who, by stealing the celestial fire (a symbol of forbidden prying into natural laws), brought on himself torment and chains and on mankind a life of brutal labour.

But more particularly in the Christian world this formless terror has taken to itself a body and a name; it is the heart of the inquisition, which has always followed with excommunications and tortures the unveiling of the recondite powers of nature. It has thus made of itself a potent factor of civilisation—some would say against civilisation, yet he is a very bold man or a very ignorant man who would brush away this long protest of religion against scientific discoveries as the mere vapourings of superstition. If we examine this bitter warfare between science and revelation, we shall find the Church actuated throughout by one ever-present, obscure dread, and when the source of this dread is made clear to us we shall be slow to condemn her conduct. We shall at least have sympathy with her in the struggle, for if she has been a persecutor, she has also been the champion of a losing cause.

At the first, indeed, she was victorious. In the conflict with what remained of Greek philosophy and science the prophets of the new revelation were easily victors. "Ignorance is the mother of devotion," was the motto of Gregory, and ignorance won the day. We love to think of the bright naturalism of antiquity as suffering martyrdom with Hypatia, philosopher and mathematician,—

> Hypatia, fair embodiment
> Of learning's great delight.

And the picture of her naked body torn to pieces by oyster shells in the hands of a bigoted mob is a true emblem of the dismemberment of the old nature-worship. Man was no longer to be an integral part of the world; he was set apart and raised above it.

But the Church did not fare so well in the ceaseless conflict with learning, when, at the time of the Renaissance, she laid violent hands on the followers of Copernicus. It may seem to us now a futile crime that Giordano Bruno should have been burned at the stake for teaching the infinity of space and the revolution of the earth about the sun, and that Galileo should have languished in prison for the same cause. But at bottom the question was one of vital importance to religion; and Bruno may have been right in saying that the sentence was pronounced against him with greater fear than he received it. Despite the

narrow bigotry displayed, it was a sublime contest for the integrity of the human soul,—for who would believe that the divine drama of redemption was wrought out for a race of puny creatures inhabiting a mere atom in the illimitable expanse of space? Copernicus and his followers disabused us of the old belief that the universe revolved about the home of man. Henceforth the history of the earth was the insignificant story of one of the least of a countless multitude of worlds. The supremacy and lordship of man in creation were no longer conceivable, and in the triumph of science our personal pride received a blow from which it has never fully recovered.

Custom and time, however, did in a way heal the wound, and things went well until the forces of science rallied once again under the banner of evolution. Volumes have been written to prove that the new belief only adds to the dignity of man, and Darwin himself professed never to understand the widespread opposition to his theory. But the new terror that aroused theological hostility was as firmly grounded as it was against the invasion of Copernicus centuries before. There is no place for Providence or for the divine prerogatives of the human soul in the law of evolution. We are made a brother to the brute and akin to unclean things that crawl in the dust. Yet this quarrel also was adjusted after a fashion, as the quarrels before it had been composed. What though ignorance is necessary to obscure

our kinship with living nature, as Pope Gregory declared; what though our home is but a point in space; what though we are inheritors of a past of brutal degradation;—still our consciousness has no recking of these things, and dwells serene in its assumption of divine supremacy and isolation.

But now at the last we are shocked out of our security. We are made conscious of the shame of the hidden past, and the ancient haunting terror is revealed in all its hideous nakedness. Have you ever by chance strayed through a museum where the relics of old-world life are gathered together,—filthy amphibians armed with impenetrable scales, grotesque serpents eight fathoms long that churned the seas, huge reptiles that beat the air with wings of nightmare breadth? The imagination recoils from picturing what the world must have been when Nature exhausted herself to fashion these abhorrent monstrosities. We have burrowed the soil and brought into the light of day these reluctant hidden records of bestial growths. Consider for a moment what it would mean if some new geology should lay bare the covered strata of memory in our own brain corresponding to these records of the earth; for there is nothing lost, and in some mysterious way the memories of all that obscure past are stored up within us. If evolution be true, we are the inheritors in our soul of the experience and life of those innumerable generations whose material forms lie moulded in the

bed-rock of earth. Consider the horror of beholding in our own consciousness the remembrance of such fears and frenzies, such cruel passions and wallowing desires as would correspond to those gigantic and abortive relics of antiquity. Would not the world in its shame cry out for some Lethean draught of sleep, though it were as profound as the oblivion of Nirvâna? This is the terror, then, that from the beginning has beset the upholders of religion, and has caused them to attack the revelations of natural science; for what faith or beauty of holiness can abide after such an uncovering? None, unless to obtain spiritual grace the whole memory and personality of a man be blotted out, and the spirit be severed from the experiences of the body by an impassable gulf. And I think the shadow of this dread is typified in the curse which Noah laid upon his son Ham.

The final outcome of this dread in all its nakedness we see foreshadowed in these fantasies and essays of an author, who, as I have attempted to show, has brought together into indissoluble union our Western theory of Darwin and that strange doctrine of metempsychosis which was carried to Japan with Buddhism and is so curiously engrafted on the laughing fancies of the people of the Mikado. To understand the tremendous realism of horror and gloom connected with this doctrine of everlasting birth and death, and re-birth, one must go to the burning valley of the Ganges,

where the conception first laid hold of the human mind. But overpowering as this notion of endless unrest may be, a new shadow would seem to be added to it by contact with the scientific hypothesis of evolution which has been developed in the Occident. Evolution is a theory, drawn from the observation of outer phenomena, that man is the last product of myriads of generations of life reaching back into the past; but evolution has foreborne to make any appeal to the inner consciousness of the human soul. Metempsychosis, on the contrary, is a half mystical theory evolved out of the consciousness of the soul, which in a dim way seems to carry remembrance of illimitable existence before its present birth. But this symbolic faith of the Orient has never sought confirmation in scientific study of the outer world. Now comes the blending of these two theories, and the result is a laying bare of those hideous realities (pray heaven they prove pseudo-realities in the end) that mankind has instinctively shunned and denounced.

It is because I see in Mr. Hearn's sketches and translations a suggestion of the incalculable influences that may spring from this union of the East and the West, that I have treated them with a seriousness that will seem to many readers greater than they deserve. The skeptical I would refer, in conclusion, to that little essay on the *Nightmare-Touch*, which attempts to account for the shuddering fear of seizure that so often

troubles our dreams, and to associate that fear with the widespread superstitious dread of being *touched* by a ghost. The closing words of the essay have the sinister beauty and acrid odour of the flowers in some Rappaccini's garden :

Furthermore, through all the course of evolution, heredity would have been accumulating the experience of such feeling. Under those forms of imaginative pain evolved through reaction of religious beliefs, there would persist some dim survival of savage primitive fears, and again, under this, a dimmer, but incomparably deeper, substratum of ancient animal-terrors. In the dreams of the modern child all these latencies might quicken—one below another—unfathomably—with the coming and the growing of nightmare.

It may be doubted whether the phantasms of any particular nightmare have a history older than the brain in which they move. But the shock of the touch would seem to indicate *some point of dream-contact with the total race-experience of shadowy seizure.* It may be that profundities of Self—abysses never reached by any ray from the life of sun—are strangely stirred in slumber, and that out of their blackness immediately responds a shuddering of memory, measureless even by millions of years.

# THE FIRST COMPLETE EDITION OF HAZLITT

If one should turn to William Hazlitt expecting to find critical essays like those we connect with writers of more recent days, he would be sadly disappointed. There is in Hazlitt's work little—were it not for a few exceptional passages that occur to memory, I should say nothing—of that looking before and after, that linking of literary movements with the great currents of human activity, which has become a part of criticism along with the growth of the historical method. He is not concerned with the searching out of larger cause and effect, but is intensely occupied with the individual man, and studies to deduce the peculiar style of each writer from his character and temperament. Nor can we hope to find in him—I say "hope" from the common point of view to-day—any trace of that scientific method which would analyse the products of the human brain as a chemist deals with "vitriol and sugar." He wrote before these things were known. He was, quite as much as Byron or Wordsworth, a child of the revolution, and his blood tingled with the new romanticism. Yet even here certain dis-

tinctions must be drawn. When we speak to-day of the romantic critic, we think of one who has joined the sensibility and fluency of the revolutionary temperament to the sympathies of the later historic method, and has taught his soul to transform itself cunningly into the various types that it chooses to study. We associate the word with that kind of fluctuating egotism which makes of the critic one "qui raconte les aventures de son âme au milieu des chefs-d'œuvre." Hazlitt was an egotist in all conscience, but of this particular form of the disease we can hardly hold him guilty. His was one of the rarest, yet most characteristic, traits of the revolutionary spirit—*gusto* he himself would call it. The word, now unfortunately falling into desuetude, connotes the power of intense enjoyment based on understanding, and is so common in his essays that Henley[1] took it as the keynote of all his work. But a still stronger term than gusto is needed, I think, to describe the swift qualities of Hazlitt's mind; he is the writer, to a supreme degree, of *passion*.

What he loved—the few great books, the one great man, the chosen scenes of nature, his youthful scheme of philosophy — he laid to his heart with passionate zest and clung to with desperate tenacity; what was hateful to him he spurned with equal vehemence. Byron speaks of his own

[1] In the Introduction to Hazlitt's *Complete Works*, in 12 vols., published by McClure, Phillips, & Co., New York. 1904.

mind as having the motion of a tiger; if he missed his leap there was no retrieving the error. That is true of Byron, who almost alone shares with Hazlitt the untamed passion of the revolutionary spirit; but it is still more true of Hazlitt, and, apart from the stress of journalism, accounts for the singular unevenness of his work. There is something even in the keen sinewy language of Hazlitt that suggests the tiger's spring. His sentences succeed one another like the rapid bounds of such an animal, and at the last comes one straight unerring leap and the prey is fixed, bleeding, you might almost say, in his grasp. There is nothing just like it among English authors. Genuine passion, indeed, if one considers it, is a rare, almost the rarest, trait in literature. Certainly in English it would not be easy to find another author whose work is so dominated by this quality as Hazlitt's. It gives the tone to his critical writing; it explains the keenness and the limitations of his psychological insight; it causes the innumerable contradictions that occur in his views; it gives rapidity to his style; it imparts a peculiar zest to his very manner of quoting; it lends exhilarating interest to his pages, yet in the long run, if we read him too continuously, it wearies us a little, for not many of us are keyed up to his high pitch. We go to him for superb rhetoric, for emotions in literary experience that stir the languid blood, but we hardly look to him for judgment. There is much

in English that assumes the passionate tone; place it beside Hazlitt and for the most part it appears tame or false.

Something of this passion we get in the very life of the man. It may be that we lend to our image of him the colours his rhetoric assumes whenever he turns aside from some critical or psychological disquisition to speak, as he so often does, of his own wayward career. Certain it is that in our fancy he moves among the group of men that we gather about his name and Lamb's (and how well we know them, and which of our living friends stands so clearly revealed to us,—the gentle Saint Charles, the cold, mechanical Godwin, the impulsive, unsubstantial Hunt, Wordsworth wrapt in the stiff robes of his priestcraft, Southey of the bustling, shallow, loyal mind, Coleridge the cloud-compeller!)—he moves among them like some creature of burning skies and flaming horizons amid the cold children of the mists. His friendships were swift, and his hatreds—how they stir in memory, still throbbing with venom! The very houses he has occupied and the scenes he has visited become vitalised with the prodigious life of the man. Memorable as is the house at No. 19 York Street for the years during which it was Milton's home, it is almost more interesting still for its association with Hazlitt. Here for a time he lived in his irregular way, going to bed when others were rising, getting up at one or two o'clock in the day, lingering for hours, when not pressed

by work, over innumerable cups of tea which he brewed to an extraordinary strength in place of forbidden intoxicants, sitting "silent, motionless, and self-absorbed, as a Turk over his opium pouch." From his windows he could look down into the garden of that monumental maker of constitutions, Jeremy Bentham (his landlord, by the way), whose heartless, frigid zeal for reform seems to have sent a shudder of aversion through Hazlitt's whole frame. His picture of Bentham throws light on his own character as being in every respect its opposite. "There you may see the lively old man," he writes, "his mind still buoyant with thought and with the prospect of the futurity, in eager conversation with some Opposition member, some expatriated patriot, or transatlantic adventurer, urging the extinction of close boroughs, or planning a code of laws for some 'lone island in the watery waste,' his walk almost amounting to a run, his tongue keeping pace with it in shrill, cluttering accents, negligent of his person, his dress, and his manner, intent only on his grand theme of *utility* — or pausing, perhaps, for want of breath and with lack-lustre eye," etc. — no wonder Hazlitt's friends or enemies trembled when they heard he was to write about them! One imagines that he was conscious while portraying Bentham of his own contrasted qualities — his loose, shambling walk, his slow, interrupted speech, except when passion made him eloquent, his dark burning eyes, his contempt

for the nerveless, cold-blooded reformers of the day.

And if his London home—one of them at least, for much of life he passed in lodging houses of a nondescript character—stands out thus vivid in memory, no less do Wem and Winterslow, his country residences, form an integral part of the impression made upon us by his writings. At Wem he lived with his father, a Unitarian minister, from his tenth to his twenty-second year, a sluggish, brooding period during which his powers seemed to have lain in some strange abeyance. Yet the vividness of his allusions to Wem in after times shows that even then he must have been gathering up those personal experiences that lend so much individuality to his most abstract essays. And it was at Wem that the impulse came which made the young man's ambition leap up within his breast like a smouldering coal beneath a sudden breeze. Coleridge came to preach at Shrewsbury, only ten miles away, and thither Hazlitt, then nearly twenty years old, walked to hear the divine words that were to be to him "far above singing." Better than that; Coleridge visited Hazlitt's father, and the meeting of the torpid youth with that soaring genius Hazlitt described years afterward in one of those essays that deal with his memorable first experiences:

> On Tuesday following the half-inspired speaker came. I was called down into the room where he was, and went, half hoping, half afraid. He received me very graciously,

and I listened for a long time without uttering a word. I did not suffer in his opinion by my silence. "For those two hours," he afterwards was pleased to say, "he was conversing with William Hazlitt's forehead." His appearance was different from what I had anticipated from seeing him before. At a distance, and in the dim light of the chapel, there was to me a strange wildness in his aspect, a dusky obscurity, and I thought him pitted with the smallpox. His complexion was at that time clear, and even bright—

"As are the children of yon azure sheen."

His forehead was high, light, as if built of ivory, with large projecting eyebrows; and his eyes rolling beneath them, like a sea with darkened lustre. "A certain tender bloom his face o'erspread," a purple tinge as we see it in the pale, thoughtful complexions of the Spanish portrait-painters, Murillo and Velasquez. His mouth was gross, voluptuous, open, eloquent; his chin good-humoured and round; but his nose, the rudder of the face, the index of the will, was small, feeble, nothing—like what he was. It might seem that the genius of his face as from a height surveyed and projected him (with sufficient capacity and huge aspiration) into the world unknown of thought and imagination, with nothing to support or guide his veering purpose, as if Columbus had launched his adventurous course for the New World in a scallop, without oars or compass.

I may be pardoned for quoting Hazlitt at this length, for in no other way, as his latest biographer has confessed, can the style and method of the man be set forth. The virtue of his work lies not in his analytic criticism, which can be studied apart from his own language, but in the

fusion of passion and insight; and in this portrait of Coleridge, which has passed into the universal heritage of English letters, we may see blended together that perception of physical traits, which was heightened no doubt by Hazlitt's training as a painter, and that power of seizing the psychological peculiarities of a man and using them to explain the character of his writing. Still more explicitly in another passage he develops the nature of Johnson's style by allusion to the dictator's physical and moral inertia; as elsewhere, he finds in Cowper's nervousness the source of his literary method, and makes of Dante the personification of blind will.

When Coleridge departed from Wem he left with the youth whose forehead he had so much admired an invitation to visit him at Nether Stowey, where also Wordsworth was to be seen. Hazlitt walked with him six miles on the road to Shrewsbury, drinking in reverently the poet's wise discourse. "On my way back," he wrote, "I had a sound in my ears — it was the voice of Fancy; I had a light before me—it was the face of Poetry. The one still lingers there, the other has not quitted my side!" And we who read the story of his glorious, passionate enthusiasm hear as it were a distant echo of that sound, and catch a fleeting glimpse of that golden light, and are heartened in our obscure walk through a world where few of us meet such poets to beguile us into forgetfulness. Truly it might be said in those

days, *οὐ γάρ τ' ἀγνῶτες θεοὶ ἀλλήλοισι πέλονται*, — not unknown does one god meet with another.

All this happened at Wem, but not less famous is Winterslow, where Hazlitt went with his wife, and where in later years, embittered by many disappointments, he retired to dream over a life which had been to him "a tissue of passion"—

> Storm, and what dreams, ye holy Gods, what dreams!

To this spot, where the happiest years of his young manhood were spent, he retired as to a sheltered place of refuge—"of all that dream-world nothing left but pain." There is no more striking artifice in any of our essayists than the way in which he breaks suddenly into some critical discourse to describe the scenes about him at his beloved Winterslow, whether from the open window he beholds the world freshened by a recent shower, or descants on a country lass picking up stones, or moralises on a spider crawling along the matted floor of his room. Here, as he thought, his very language was apt to be "redundant and excursive," although at other times it might be "cramped, dry, abrupt." Or, again, his fancy took a wider range, as in his *Farewell to Essay Writing:*

> We walk through life, as through a narrow path, with a thin curtain drawn around it; behind are ranged rich portraits, airy harps are strung—yet we will not stretch

forth our hands and lift aside the veil, to catch glimpses of the one, or sweep the chords of the other. As in a theatre, when the old-fashioned green curtain drew up, groups of figures, fantastic dresses, laughing faces, rich banquets, stately columns, gleaming vistas appeared beyond; so we have only at any time to "peep through the blanket of the past," to possess ourselves at once of all that has regaled our senses, that is stored up in our memory, that has struck our fancy, that has pierced our hearts—yet to all this we are indifferent, insensible, and seem intent only on the present vexation, the future disappointment. . . . I can easily, by stooping over the long-sprent grass and clay-cold clods, recall the tufts of primroses, or purple hyacinths, that formerly grew on the same spot, and cover the bushes with leaves and singing birds, as they were eighteen summers ago; or prolonging my walk and hearing the sighing gale rustle through a tall, straight wood at the end of it, can fancy that I distinguish the cry of hounds, and the fatal group issuing from it, as in the tale of Theodore and Honoria. A moaning gust of wind aids the belief; I look once more to see whether the trees before me answer to the idea of the horror-stricken grove, and an air-built city towers over their grey tops.

> "Of all the cities in Romanian lands,
> The chief and most renown'd Ravenna stands."

I return home resolved to read the entire poem through, and, after dinner, drawing my chair to the fire, and holding a small print close to my eyes, launch into the full tide of Dryden's couplets (a stream of sound), comparing his didactic and descriptive pomp with the simpler pathos and picturesque truth of Boccaccio's story.

A cynic might point a moral from the fact that the only events of Hazlitt's life which were utterly

free from the intrusion of passion were his two ventures into matrimony. His first marriage, to Sarah Stoddart, was to all appearances purely an affair of convenience arranged, or at least fostered, by Mary Lamb. That the bride had an income of £120 from cottages at Winterslow seems to have been her chief attraction for the eccentric wooer. Later on Hazlitt, to suit his pleasure, allowed her to obtain a divorce. A second marriage, with a widow, Mrs. Bridgewater, contained an element of almost comical indifference on both sides, and the two soon separated to their mutual advantage. But from these experiments in matrimony it should not be argued that Hazlitt was deaf to the elemental appeal of love. It is to be feared, on the contrary, that he turned wilfully from the Uranian to the Pandemian goddess. Certainly the episode, which was the occasion of his divorce and which he gave to the world in his *Liber Amoris*—whatever else may be said about it —is one of the few stories of strong, unrestrained passion in the range of English letters. We might like, for decorum's sake, to expunge that relation from his life and from his works; "there is," as he himself confessed, "something in it discordant to honest ears." The tale is simply the vulgar adventure of a man who dandles the daughter of his lodging-house keeper on his knees, becomes infatuated with her, pours out the agony of his dejection in letters to his friends, and then prints letters and all, somewhat expur-

gated to be sure, in a book. That is bad enough, in all conscience; but the matter has been made worse by the recent publication of the actual correspondence. As Mr. Austin Dobson says: "The whole sentimental structure of the *Liber Amoris* now sinks below the stage, and joins the realm of things unspeakable—'vile kitchen stuff,' fit only for the midden." And yet there is a reservation to be made withal to this criticism. The book is something more than merely sentimental; it is in part one of the very few expressions of genuine passion in the English language, of that absolute passion which taught him, as it long ago taught Propertius,

Hanc animam extremæ reddere nequitiæ.

No one, I think, can read Hazlitt's last despairing letter without feeling that note of verity and genuineness which does much to justify what might otherwise seem an indecent exposure of personal emotion. "I saw her pale, cold form glide silent by me," he writes, "dead to shame as to pity. Still I seemed to clasp this piece of witchcraft to my bosom; this lifeless image, which was all that was left of my love, was the only thing to which my sad heart clung. Were she dead, should I not wish to gaze once more upon her pallid features? She is dead to me; but what she once was to me can never die! The agony, the conflict of hope and fear, of adoration and jealousy is over; or it would, ere long, have ended my life."

And his last words are touched with the strange tenderness and pathos of a man whose life is centred in the brooding faculties of the mind:

I am afraid she will soon grow common to my imagination, as well as worthless in herself. Her image seems fast "going into the wastes of time," like a weed that the wave bears farther and farther from me. Alas! thou poor hapless weed, when I entirely lose sight of thee, and forever, no flower will ever bloom on earth to glad my heart again!

It is not surprising, after all, that Hazlitt took a sort of glory to himself in this episode which his biographers to-day would so gladly forget. "I am in some sense proud," he says, "that I can feel this dreadful passion—it gives one a kind of rank in the kingdom of love." One is reminded again of the boast of Cynthia's lover, that the Roman youths would do reverence at his tomb for his long ardours. The vulgarity of this incident in Hazlitt's life is not due to the excess of his emotion, but to the worthlessness of the object on which his emotion was expended. There is something pitiful as well as degrading in the spectacle of this vehement passion beating itself against a poor flabby creature which could neither withstand nor return the shock. It is only fair after exposing this episode in Hazlitt's life to quote Lamb's beautiful encomium of his old friend:

But, protesting against much that he has written, and some things which he chooses to do; judging him by his conversation which I enjoyed so long, and relished so

deeply; or by his books, in those places where no clouding passion intervenes—I should belie my own conscience if I said less than that I think W. H. to be, in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing. So far from being ashamed of that intimacy, which was betwixt us, it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such another companion.

Such is the man whose scattered works are now for the first time collected in a complete and critically annotated edition, and it has been at least curious to observe the comments brought out in the press by this belated rehabilitation. There seems to be a concerted opinion that Hazlitt is read only by those technically interested in authorship, as if his essays were out of touch with life, were indeed essentially bookish, and for the bookish reader only. In attempting to show the perversity of this view, I have perhaps dwelt too much on Hazlitt the man, and said too little specifically about his essays; my justification lies in the fact that the temperament of the writer dominates his work to so overmastering a degree that to unfold the one is properly to criticise the other.

# CHARLES LAMB

In a well-known essay Hazlitt, writing from memory, has attempted to record one of those famous conversations that took place among the little group that used to gather in Lamb's chambers in the Inner Temple. The subject on this particular night was *Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen*, and the discussion ended with that beautiful comparison by the host himself of their supposed behaviour if Shakespeare and "that other" should suddenly appear at the door. I think to-day if such a conversation should occur that Lamb's own name would be almost the first to arise on the lips of any lover of literature. Other writers—great poets and philosophers and novelists—we may admire more for their accomplishment, but none of these has so endeared himself to us personally as "Elia," none of them is cherished in our imagination with so sweet a savour. There has in fact grown up a kind of legend about his name.[1] He is, if ever writer

[1] It may be counted as the latest step in Lamb's canonisation that two scholars have been spending the labour of years in giving his works proper editorial care. The edition of Mr. E.V. Lucas, imported by G. P. Putnam's Sons, is notable for the assiduity with which he has run down

were, human in his weaknesses as in his strength, yet he dwells apart in our affection not quite as other men do. "If there be a Good Man, Charles Lamb is one," said Wordsworth, who was not overmuch given to praising. Good man he was, but to us he has come to be something more. We like to think of him rather in the words of Thackeray, which FitzGerald remembered and quoted long afterwards: "'Saint Charles!' said Thackeray to me thirty years ago, putting one of C. L.'s letters to his forehead." Thirty years ago went back to 1848, and the letter that so moved Thackeray was one written by Lamb in 1824 to Bernard Barton, with a pretty postcript to Lucy who was later to bring the ill-fate of matrimony upon FitzGerald. That was the year also, 1824, in which Lamb wrote his verses *In the Album of Lucy Barton:*

> Little Book, surnamed of *white*,
> Clean as yet, and fair to sight,
> Keep thy attribution right.
>
> Never disproportion'd scrawl;
> Ugly blot, that 's worse than all;
> On thy maiden clearness fall!

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Lamb's allusions and quotations. The edition of Mr. William Macdonald, imported by E. P. Dutton & Co., is one of Dent's admirable publications, and is better fitted for ordinary reading. Both editions are very complete, and contain much new matter. The restoration of the true text of the Letters is alone a service to be grateful for. 1904.

. . . . . .

Whitest thoughts in whitest dress,
Candid meanings, best express
Mind of quiet Quakeress.

It would be a pretty fancy to visualise the scene that dwelt so long in FitzGerald's memory —the letter which Lucy Barton had cherished for twenty-four years and had apparently lent or given to FitzGerald, her lover, if that word can be used of so cool a wooer; FitzGerald showing it to Thackeray, and the great novelist, with the story of *Pendennis* then at work in his brain, laying it reverently to his forehead as if it had been some holy relic. Lionel Johnson has caught the phrase up into a poem that expresses most aptly our feeling to-day:

*Saint Charles!* for Thackeray called thee so:
Saint, at whose name our fond hearts glow:
See now, this age of tedious woe,
That snaps and snarls!
Thine was a life of tragic shade;
A life, of care and sorrow made:
But nought could make thine heart afraid,
Gentle Saint Charles!

Encumbered dearly with old books,
Thou, by the pleasant chimney nooks,
Didst laugh, with merry-meaning looks,
Thy griefs away;
We, bred on modern magazines,
Point out, how much our sadness means,
And some new woe our wisdom gleans,
Day by dull day.

Lover of London! whilst thy feet
Haunted each old familiar street,
Thy brave heart found life's turmoil sweet,
Despite life's pain.
We fume and fret and, when we can,
Cry up some new and noisy plan,
Big with the Rights and Wrongs of Man:
And where 's the gain?

Gentle *Saint Charles!* I turn to thee,
Tender and true: thou teachest me
To take with joy, what joys there be,
And bear the rest.
Walking thy London day by day,
The thought of thee makes bright my way,
And in thy faith I fain would stay,
Doing my best.

That is the golden chain from the past to the present—Lamb, Lucy Barton, Thackeray, Fitz-Gerald, Lionel Johnson.

But if Lamb has grown to be Saint Charles to us, it is for other reasons than those which hallow the sacred names of the calendar. We think of the saints as of men who have risen above the turmoil of life, together with its frailties, and there is something austere in their altitude. To us they seem a little sad, and we are not sure we should choose them for companions. With Lamb it is quite different. His very errors have become a part of the sweet legend that surrounds him. We remember his taste for the exhilarating cup, and think we should like him best when warmed by kindly potations. Who could have resisted an

invitation to those *noctes ambrosianæ:* "Cards & cold mutton in Russell St. on Friday at 8 & nine. Gin and Jokes from ½ past that time to 12"? We remember, too, his reply to the bishop who inquired how he had learned to smoke such furious pipes: "Sir, I toiled for it as some men toil for virtue!" Even his trick of stammering is a cherished accident of his humorous talk, and without his wavering gait and those poor spindle-legs we should lose some relish of his perambulations in London streets. Were this all, we might enjoy his wit and laugh at his oddities as it had been another Theodore Hook; but beneath this seeming levity there was, as all the world now knows, a deep-sunk basis of character and of tragic circumstance. There is no need to rehearse the fatal scene in the Temple when Mary in a sudden frenzy of madness killed her mother, or to relate the brother's lifelong devotion and renunciation. Lamb was twenty-one years old at the time of the incident, a youth given to indulge in somewhat vague literary aspirations and vaguer religious yearnings under the domination of Coleridge. The effect of that frightful scene on his oversensitive nerves (he had himself passed six weeks in a madhouse less than a year before) was indelible. At first it deepened his religious vein with results not fortunate for literature; for the piety of a young man is not often edifying, and if there be any part of Lamb's writings one could wish away, it is certainly those early letters in

which he mouths religion with his mentor. But the mood soon changes. Rather abruptly in the year 1800 (four years after the calamity) we observe a complete alteration in his tone. He has shaken off the ghostly dominion of Coleridge, whose patronising ways have evidently grown a little irksome. The last straw, apparently, was when Coleridge used the epithet "gentle" of him in a poem. Lamb resents the word with some asperity, and, in place of confessing his soul, breaks out into the boast that he is "suffering from the combined effects of two days' drunkenness." We hope that he exaggerates his debauchery somewhat, but, true or fanciful, that confession marks the beginning of the real Charles Lamb. Thenceforth his letters and his more deliberate productions show what can only be called a half-conscious pose, a humorous waiving of the serious matters of life, a refusal to harbour the deeper emotions, as if he had chosen for his motto those words in an earlier letter: "With me 'the former things are passed away,' and I have something more to do than to feel." The tragic circumstance is still not far removed, and the recurring allusion to Mary "from home" throws a touch of half-averted pathos into the humour—pathos that only at long intervals rises into shrillness, as when, under unusual stress, he exclaims to Wordsworth: "They have had the care of her before. I see little of her: alas! I too often hear her. *Sunt lachrymæ rerum!*" But for the most

part the sadness of his mood passes through the same change as the other emotions and peers at us through the quaint mask of a jest. "The wind is tempered to the shorn Lambs," he writes in a letter to Miss Hutchinson, after telling how Mary has been "gone from home these five weeks."

This, then, is the Lamb so endeared to our imagination. When the calamity first smote him down and he cried out to his friend for consolation, Coleridge responded: "I look upon you as a man called by sorrow and anguish, and a strange desolation of hopes, into quietness, and a soul set apart and made peculiar to God!" He was indeed a soul set apart, but it was to man, not to God. He alone found the secret of sacrificing his heart to stern and unrelenting duty and of dwelling the while resolutely on the surface of life, a patron of puns and a devotee of the genial vices. And this is the quality of his writings as well as of his character, although some, I know, misled by their devotion, would discover graver traits in his work. One of his latest editors, Mr. Macdonald, insists that "his intellect was the primary and really great thing in him, greater and rarer far than his humour or any other separable qualities recognised in literature." That is true in a sense, but it is intellect turned from the deeper questions and made to play over the surface of things with a coruscating light that prevents the eye from penetrating into their

depths. There is an exquisite make-believe about his essays, like the quieting unreality of country scenes to one whose life has been "in populous cities pent." No doubt a vein of pathos runs through them all, but it is of a mocking kind and makes no appeal to the *lacrimarum fons*. *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago* was in reality a school of hard discipline; passed through the alembic of Lamb's fancy, it becomes unreal and very beautiful, a memory of dreams. He goes to *Oxford in the Vacation*, and that city of scholars and gay livers is suddenly transformed into a refuge of ghosts.

> What a place to be in is an old library! [he exclaims.] It seems as though all the souls of all the writers that have bequeathed their labours to these Bodleians were reposing here, as in some dormitory, or middle state. I do not want to handle, to profane the leaves, their winding sheets. I could as soon dislodge a shade. I seem to inhale learning, walking amid their foliage: and the odour of their old moth-scented coverings is fragrant as the first bloom of those sciential apples which grew amid the happy orchard.

The same dissolving power of the fancy is turned upon *The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*, and the place is forever haunted by those three *revenants*, Thomas Coventry, Samuel Salt, and Peter Pierson, walking not with arms linked together—"as now our stout triumvirs sweep the streets"—but with hands folded behind their backs, strange figures that are very much of this earth,

yet somehow unconcerned with its prosaic business. He writes of those "dim specks" of the London streets, the childish *Chimney-Sweepers* "blooming through their first nigritude," who "from their pulpits (the tops of chimneys), in the nipping air of a December morning, preach a lesson of patience to mankind"; and their sermon is a quaint echo of the Shakespearian,

> Golden lads and lasses must,
> As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Or he takes the beggars of the metropolis for a theme, and in place of the brutal and hideous pictures which a modern "naturalist" would give us, he turns to muse on the idyllic tenderness of Vincent Bourne's blind vagrant and dog:

> Hi mores, hæc vita fuit, dum fata sinebant.

Again, he gathers up into an essay the bereavements and long abnegations of his bachelor life, and instead of the bitter arraignment of Thomson's outcast in *The City of Dreadful Night* or the half-renounced envy of Christina Rossetti—

> While I? I sat alone and watched;
> My lot in life, to live alone
> In mine own world of interests,
> Much felt but little shown;—

instead of these, he has woven his regrets into *Dream Children, a Reverie*, where the pathos is as

aërial and undisturbing as the shadows that fall from smoke.

And his critical disquisitions, fine and penetrating as they are in many respects, have to my mind something of the same unsubstantiality. I read of Shakespeare in Lamb's essays, and I do not seem to be in the presence of the great constructive dramatist who carried the weight of human experience in his brain, but of some sovereign alchemist skilled to convert the leaden cares of life into golden leaf. It is characteristic of Lamb's paradoxical spirit and half-conscious irony that he should have found Shakespeare more fitted for the cabinet, where the reader's fancy had freer license to sport, than for the stage with its closer confinement of realism. The whole Elizabethan drama, which he so loved and which he did so much to restore to general favour, attracted him chiefly by its salient points of light, and the plays of the Restoration were avowedly dear to him because they carry us into a region "beyond the diocese of the strict conscience," into the vision of that "pageant where we should sit as unconcerned at the issues, for life or death, as at a battle of the frogs and mice."

Much of Lamb's poetry is of a frankly ephemeral sort, album verses for importunate young ladies and the like, but even in those poems that are in a way dedicated to the severer muses the same note of fanciful unreality, concealing a basis of discarded emotions, may be heard as in

the letters and essays. I think this note can be detected in his tragedy of *John Woodvil*, in his lament over *The Old Familiar Faces*, written, be it observed, when he was scarcely out of his teens, and in those lovely stanzas to *Hester*, whose close rises higher in poetic grace perhaps than he anywhere else attained:

> My spritely neighbour, gone before
> To that unknown and silent shore,
> Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
> Some Summer morning,
>
> When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
> Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
> A bliss that would not go away,
> A sweet fore-warning?

Those verses, we know, were inspired by a young Quaker whom Lamb was "in love with" for some years while he lived at Pentonville, and to whom, characteristically, he never once spoke. Their charm is of the Elizabethan school, but they follow the models of the lesser poets who turned from the direct expression of the emotions and from the language of power to the more wanton light of the fancy. It would be interesting, if not too technical, to carry this contrast into the very mechanism of Lamb's style and show how it is based on the Euphuistic school and on the metaphysical writers who cared more for the lambent play of the intellect than for directness and depth of impression. His language does not flow, but

moves with a continual eddy; the interest is in the quaintness of individual words and phrases rather than in sustained harmony. The effect is delightful, piquant, tantalising, and at times, it must be confessed, a little *saccadé* and even wearisome. We remember this criticism which Lamb pronounced on *Elia*, "The informal habit of his mind, joined to an inveterate impediment of speech, forbade him to be an orator," and we wonder whether this impediment does not now and then manifest itself in a certain retardation of his written, as well as his spoken, utterance. Unique and exquisite as his more artificial language often is, I confess to like even better those occasional passages where he forgets his mannerism and speaks out with simple straightforwardness. As an illustration of this chaster style I would select that vindication of his friend in the letter of *Elia to Robert Southey*, which I have already cited in my characterisation of Hazlitt. The passage, thus inviting a comparison with Hazlitt, would have the further merit of calling attention to the widely different traditions which, coming down side by side in English literature from the beginning, have divided the aims of these two friends. Hazlitt, with his passion and force and weight of utterance, descends by direct inheritance from Marlowe and Hooker and Milton; Lamb, with his quaintness and emphasis on phrase and word, is a later-born brother of Lyly and Sidney and Quarles and Fuller.

Only one writer, perhaps, ever united in his own genius these two divergent temperaments — Sir Thomas Browne.

But we must not forget that it is the man Charles Lamb after all which makes his writings so precious, nor lose sight of that fine personality of his which so intimately pervades his essays and sketches that they seem all to drop naturally into place with his private correspondence. Nor, as I have attempted to show, is the whimsical license of his character the least fascinating phase of it for us to-day. With what Olympian assurance this man of many renunciations knew how to jest! There is a story of his Jovian hilarity told in Haydon's *Diary* which has been quoted more than once, and which I may be permitted to borrow in turn. A constellation of poets, as Lamb might say, had foregathered in Haydon's chambers, and into their midst had strayed an admiring but prosaic gentleman, a nameless Comptroller of Stamps. Says the diarist:

When we retired to tea we found the Comptroller. In introducing him to Wordsworth I forgot to say who he was. After a little time the Comptroller looked down, looked up, and said to Wordsworth, "Don't you think, sir, Milton was a great genius?" Keats looked at me, Wordsworth looked at the Comptroller. Lamb, who was dozing by the fire, turned round and said: "Pray, sir, did you say Milton was a great genius?" "No, sir, I asked Mr. Wordsworth if he were not?" "Oh," said Lamb, "then you are a silly fellow." "Charles! my dear Charles!" said Wordsworth; but Lamb, perfectly inno-

cent of the confusion he had created, was off again by the fire.

After an awful pause, the Comptroller said: "Don't you think Newton a great genius?" I could not stand it any longer. Keats put his head into my books. Ritchie squeezed in a laugh. Wordsworth seemed asking himself, "Who is this?" Lamb got up, and taking a candle, said: "Sir, will you allow me to look at your phrenological development?" He then turned his back on the poor man, and at every question of the Comptroller he chanted:

> "Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John
> Went to bed with his breeches on."

The man in office, finding Wordsworth did not know who he was, said in spasmodic and half-chuckling anticipation of assured victory: "I have had the honour of some correspondence with you, Mr. Wordsworth." "With me, sir?" said Wordsworth; "not that I remember." "Don't you, sir? I am a Comptroller of Stamps." There was a dead silence; the Comptroller evidently thinking that was enough. While we were waiting for Wordsworth's reply, Lamb sung out:

> "Hey diddle, diddle,
> The cat and the fiddle."

"My dear Charles!" said Wordsworth.

> "Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John,"

chanted Lamb; and then, rising, exclaimed: "Do let me have another look at that gentleman's organs." Keats and I hurried Lamb into the painting room, shut the door, and gave way to inextinguishable laughter. Monkhouse followed and tried to get Lamb away. We went back, but the Comptroller was irreconcilable. We

soothed and smiled, and asked him to supper. He stayed, though his dignity was sorely affected. However, being a good-natured man, we parted all in good humour, and no ill effects followed.

All the while, until Monkhouse succeeded, we could hear Lamb struggling in the painting room and calling at intervals, "Who is that fellow? Allow me to see his organs once more."

Certainly the denizens of Olympus laid aside their dignity on that day; an unsympathetic observer might even have found them acting perilously like buffoons. Indeed, there is another aspect that cannot be disregarded in the whole conduct of this genial wit. Sometimes, if the truth must out, that terrible picture of the man as he appeared to Carlyle recurs unpleasantly to the memory:

Charles Lamb and his sister came daily once or oftener; a very sorry pair of phenomena. Insuperable proclivity to *gin*, in poor old Lamb. His talk contemptibly small, indicating wondrous ignorance and shallowness . . . in fact, more like "diluted insanity" (as I defined it) than anything of real jocosity, "humour," or geniality. . . . He was the *leanest* of mankind, tiny black breeches buttoned to the knee-cap, and no farther, surmounting spindle legs also in black, face and head fineish, black, bony, lean, and of a Jew type rather; in the eyes a kind of *smoky* brightness or confused sharpness; spoke with a stutter; in walking tottered and shuffled; emblem of imbecility bodily and spiritual (something of real *insanity*, I have understood), and yet something, too, of humane, ingenuous, pathetic, sportfully much-enduring. Poor Lamb! He was infinitely astonished at my Wife;

and her quiet encounter of his too ghastly London wit by cheerful native ditto. Adieu, poor Lamb!

There are occasions when his persistent refusal to face, in words at least, the graver issues of life, when his deliberate search for the quaint and the affected do actually present him in this spectral aspect which struck Carlyle. He could jest in an essay over his drunkenness; hanging and the stocks were to him a subject of laughter; the stale Elizabethan mockery of "horns" was still comical to him; love, sickness, death, even friendship, in which he was so much honoured, were in turn given over to his amusement. We remember Emerson's trumpet-text from the Koran: "The heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, think ye we have created them in jest?" How refreshing it would be if a little oftener this much-enduring man would lay aside his pose and speak out straight from the heart, if he could find confidence to lose his wit in the tragic emotions that must have waked with him by day and slept with him at night. And in the end it seems almost as if fate had taken revenge on him for his wilful disregard of sorrow and pain. All letters are sad as the writer approaches old age, but few are so strangely and unconsciously disturbing as Lamb's. As the burden of years closed in upon him and the buoyancy of spirit passed away, there came in its place a weary vacuity, a bleak mockery of wit, broken at times by a stammering cry of pain such as it is not good to hear. We resent

this failure of his long-sustained wit. The picture of the lonely man moving from home to home in the suburbs of London is pathetic almost to tears. So the ineluctable Nemesis overtook him, too, at the last. And if you ask me how I reconcile this aspect of Lamb with that other aspect which has gained for him the title of saint, I reply that I do not attempt to reconcile them. It all depends on the reader and on the reader's changing moods. There is a time to look solemnly into the face of life, and then these letters and essays repel us, as they did Carlyle, with their ghastly London wit. There is a time for laughter and for quaint fancy that dallies lightly with the emotions, and then we reflect on the sublime courage of this man who could smile where others would despair, and with Thackeray we lay his letters to our forehead, and call him Saint Charles. And the latter mood is wiser, on the whole, and safer and more just.

# KIPLING AND FITZGERALD

## "THE SEVEN SEAS" AND "THE RUBÁIYÁT"

THERE was a story current not long ago of a London editor who was rash enough to wager that no paragraph on Kipling or FitzGerald should appear in his journal during a stated period,—and, needless to add, he lost the bet in the very next issue. This endless flux of gossip about two chosen names, with here and there a word of serious criticism smuggled in, is indeed one of the curiosities of our modern literary magazines; and the peculiarity of it all is enhanced by the fact that two authors could scarcely be selected from the body of English literature more opposed to each other in style and intention.[1]

Apart from this journalistic notoriety, none of

[1] This essay was written for the *Atlantic Monthly* in the year 1899, and was not, I think, a false presentation of literary conditions when both Kipling and FitzGerald were at their apogee. Since that time the habit of writing recklessly about Kipling, at least, has gone out of style. As regards FitzGerald, I feel, in reading over these pages, that the silly talk of the day led me to pass too lightly over the extraordinary beauty and humanity of his work.

our poets, not even Byron, has enjoyed just the kind of popularity which Kipling has achieved. Other poets have received equal or greater honour from the cultured public, but our new Anglo-Saxon bard appeals with like force to the scholarly and the illiterate; his speech has become, as it were, the voice of the people. Mr. William Archer, in his *American Jottings*, gives an apt illustration of this. On leaving his steamer at New York Mr. Archer "jumped on the platform of a horse-car on West Street," and was accosted by the conductor as follows: "'I s'pose you 've heard that Kipling has been very ill? . . . He 's pulling through now, though. . . . He ought to be the next Poet Laureate. . . . He don't follow no beaten tracks. He cuts a road for himself every time, right through; an' a mighty good road, too!'"

The fame of the *Rubáiyát* is of a different sort altogether, yet not less real in its own sphere. One of our ambassadors, himself a devotee of the "Suffolk dreamer," has related how he heard a stanza of the poem quoted in a far-away mining camp; and I have read of a society of enthusiasts in England, who, with roses garlanding their brows, meet together and dine in honour of their prophet. Very few poems, perhaps no poem of its length, have exercised so marked an effect on writers of a certain class; and the homage paid to this jewel among translations is strikingly manifested by the number of aspirants—including Mr. Le Gallienne, it may be observed, one of Kipling's

few literary foes—who have tried, and are still trying, to do the work over again more to their own taste, eager apparently to win renown by gilding refined gold.

The interest taken in these two authors is, in fact, so persistent and so extraordinary that it might seem as if the *corpus vulgatum* of our poetry were destined to shrink within these narrow limits; and it is a timely question to consider what strange fatality has yoked together in notoriety this ill-assorted couple, and what their fame signifies to us in our racial development.

The cause of Kipling's popularity is not far to seek. For many years the Anglo-Saxon people, in their ever-growing self-consciousness, have been waiting for some poet to formulate their experiences and needs, and have not been slow to express open dissatisfaction with otherwise accredited singers. Tennyson dwelt for them in a world of shadowy idealism; he had no sympathy with the democratic movement; he lapsed in his latter days into a vein of pantheistic mysticism especially abhorrent to the straightforward Briton. Browning was concerned mainly with that subtle line of demarcation between the worlds of sense and faith which finds its problems and symbolism in the Roman Church,—and nothing so disturbs the stolid Philistine as this blending of the real and the unreal; furthermore Browning was obscure. Longfellow sang with exquisite grace the virtues and aspirations of the home-loving people,

but failed to voice its rude conquering temper out-of-doors. Matthew Arnold chose for himself a region of sublimated doubt and faith, interesting enough to Oxford, but incomprehensible to the larger public. Each and all of these poets had of necessity strong traits of the Anglo-Saxon character, but they missed its dominant chord, and so remained more or less isolated in the realm of pure art.

For this reason we can understand the acclaim with which a poet has been received who actually sings in stirring rhythms the instincts of the people. And in truth both the virtues and defects of Kipling are such as to render him a popular idol. One cannot easily imagine to himself a car conductor enthusiastic over Milton or Spenser or Shakespeare; these luminaries revolve in a region beyond his comprehension. Yet if Kipling fails to strike the highest note, the reception given him by such critics as Professor Norton proves that he, too, in his own way, is a true artist and no mountebank of the crossroads.

Probably what first impresses every one on reading *The Seven Seas*—and the idea comes with peculiar emphasis these days—is the imperialistic temper of the poet; his earnest conviction that the English race, "the Sons of the Blood," are destined to sweep over the earth and fulfil the law of order and civilisation. "After the use of the English, in straight-flung words and few," he has sung his stave of victory so lustily

that the hearts of the toilers in the fields and of the "dreamers, dreaming greatly, in the man-stifled town," have leaped in response to his call. So great is the influence of hymns like the *Recessional* and *The White Man's Burden* that to his fame as a poet has been added something of the authority of a statesman; he has made himself, as no other poet before him, *accepti pars imperii*. His sympathy with the impulse towards expansion and his penetration into the hidden causes of ferment are written large in his *Song of the English*. He sees in the forward movement no ministerial programme or prudential wisdom, such as guides the rulers of Germany and France to fortify their empire by seizing new lands, but an irresistible impulse of the people driving them out to subdue and possess.

Came the Whisper, came the Vision, came the Power with the Need,
Till the Soul that is not man's soul was lent us to lead.
As the deer breaks—as the steer breaks—from the herd where they graze,
In the faith of little children we went on our ways.

But there is another and a deeper instinct of the Anglo-Saxon race than the impulse to expand and absorb. With the power of conquest they carry everywhere the law of order and obedience.

The 'eathen in 'is blindness bows down to wood an' stone;
'E don't obey no orders unless they is 'is own;
'E keeps 'is side-arms awful: 'e leaves 'em all about,
An' then comes up the regiment an' pokes the 'eathen out,—

sings Tommy Atkins in his vigorous barrack-room idiom; and he is right. It is the sense of life as a vast complicated organisation, in which every member must play his part bravely and uncomplainingly in subjection to the whole; it is the hearkening to "Law, Orrder, Duty an' Restraint, Obedience, Discipline!" so eloquently ascribed by Mister McAndrews to his beloved "seven thousand horse-power," that impels the race inevitably to its goal. There may be, indeed there are, a few left, even in England, who are not "damned ijjits," and who still think something of the old romance at sea is spoiled by steam; who feel that in some way the fairer and richer flower of life is crushed out by the grinding of mill wheels, and that there is a deeper joy of philosophy than can come to a man driven ruthlessly and restlessly by his own invented machine. But the truth remains that the civilisation of the day is a product of iron and steam, and that victory belongs to those who are strong to adapt themselves to the new demands. Our late war with Spain was sufficient proof of this.

Is it strange, therefore, that the people of England and America, in these days of unsettled ideals, should be genuinely thrilled by the clarion notes of a poet who sings of the courage and discipline of the men behind the "reeking tube" with a vigour and truth, if not with a grace, equal to Homer's glorification of the ancient bronze-clad heroes; who sees in one of the masterful inven-

tions of commerce a mystical Power carrying salutations and warnings "o'er the waste of the ultimate slime," and whispering its message of union to worlds dissevered by the sea; who has brought together, and in a way spiritualised, all the "miracles" of a materialistic age for the celebration of his love; who has discovered in the despised banjo, that can "travel with the cooking-pots and pails," a true successor of the heroic lyre, and has heard from this "Prophet of the Utterly Absurd" a divine song crying to the dweller in wild places:

> By the wisdom of the centuries I speak—
> To the tune of yestermorn I set the truth—
> I, the joy of life unquestioned—I, the Greek—
> I, the everlasting Wonder Song of Youth!—

is it strange that such a singer should appeal to the busy brood of the old "Seawife" with something more than the force of a mere lover of beauty and maker of pretty verses? The eyes even of the dullest are opened, and from the midst of his homely surroundings he seems to see arise in the purity of uncorrupted loveliness the vision of the *True Romance*:

> A veil to draw 'twixt God His law
> And man's infirmity,
> A shadow kind to dumb and blind
> The shambles where we die.

But there is a still higher reach in Kipling than this glorification of a prosaic civilisation and this

lauding of the character militant. At its best, his sense of order and obedience rises into a pure feeling for righteousness that reminds one of the ancient Hebrew prophets. He has in him something of the stern Calvinistic temper of his own McAndrews brooding over a world in which the active and mechanical virtues fulfil their mission under the law of "interdependence absolute, foreseen, ordained, decreed." We shall not soon outlive the impression produced on the Anglo-Saxon heart by those unexpected words, "Lest we forget, lest we forget!" Amid the empty jubilation of a thoughtless optimism, the mind was suddenly brought to recoil upon itself, and ask what higher destiny was ruling in the affairs of men. The Anglo-Saxon race more than any other has retained the real temper of Hebraism, the worship of a force, dwelling apart yet human in its limitations, that shapes the activities of the world to its own devising. Jehovah, the Lord of righteousness, is still England's God, and nowhere else is the religion of the land better expressed than in the *Hymn before Action:*

The earth is full of anger,
The seas are dark with wrath,
The Nations in their harness
Go up against our path:
Ere yet we loose the legions—
Ere yet we draw the blade,
Jehovah of the Thunders,
Lord God of Battles, aid!

When to Kipling's instinctive utterance of the popular needs are added his wit and dramatic power, his skill in telling a story, his mastery of the clinging epithet, his pulsating language and sturdy rhythms, it is easy to understand his immense vogue. The limitations that debar him from ranking with the truly great poets of England and the world are again inherent in the people for whom he writes,—limitations which the master singers were able to transcend while still retaining the strength of the national character.

It is one of the ironical whims of Fate that the man who stands preëminently for the Anglo-Saxon and Hebraic temperament should have been born in India, the land furthest removed from that temper of all the world. Righteousness that rules in the hurly-burly of a contentious life, he knows and celebrates; but of that other spirit that turns from the passion and toil of existence as from a wasteful illusion, and whose eyes are set on solitude and a triumph of peace beyond earthly victories, there is in Kipling hardly a breath. I know that a poet is not called to be a mystic, that his office is not that of a Hindu rishi or a mediæval Thomas à Kempis. There must be about him always something of that union of *l'illusion et la sagesse* which to Joubert seemed the essence of art. Yet poetry, to accomplish its nobler mission, must both evoke and lay the passions. Through the din of personal struggle and personal emotions must break at times the voice

of something deeper within us, calling us to rest. In the clash of worldly ambitions it happens now and then to a man to pause, while a feeling of unreality comes over him; and for a moment he knows that his concern in the drama about him is purely fictitious, and that there is a witness looking down with disdain on the strutting part he plays. No man ever achieved anything really great in this world without these moments of deeper insight, and without a certain contemptuous indifference to his own fate. No poet ever causes the hearts of his hearers to expand with the larger joy who does not lift the veil occasionally and destroy the illusion he is himself creating.

So at times, in Homer, the ten years of calamity about Ilium seem filled with the warfare of shadows.

> Thus the gods fated, and such ruin wove,
> That song might flourish for posterity,

he sings, as if the wrath of Achilles and the tragic courage of Hector were no more than the phantasmagoria of a dream. Both Achilles and Hector fight ever with the sure foreboding of death upon them; and in the last book of the *Odyssey*, —which is certainly added as a summing up and conclusion for both poems,—the stalwart heroes who led the tumult of battle now move before us as shadows whose futile life is but a mockery of their former strenuous deeds. Virgil makes the

plot of his epic revolve about the dim pantheistic scenes of the sixth canto, where all that precedes and all the events that are to follow arise in vision, like figures beheld through the uncertain glimmering of the moon. Throughout the poet's works the mind is continually startled by phrases filled with a strange mystical glamour. *Dabit deus his quoque finem!* cries Æneas, and we feel always that there is a fate akin to the peace of death brooding over the actions and guiding them to their end. Nor is Shakespeare different in this respect from the masters of antiquity. Who can forget the sensation of sudden liberty and enlargement that came to him, as if some new chamber of thought or windows of wider outlook were opened to his mind, when, after the storm of passion and ambition in Macbeth, the fated victim hears of the queen's death? His cry of disillusion is in the memory of every one, but repeated quotation cannot diminish its force or pertinency:

> She should have died hereafter;
> There would have been a time for such a word.
> To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
> Life 's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

So essential is this higher element of poetry that a French writer of some reputation has developed it into a complete theory of mysticism. By the side of the indispensable dialogue which depends on the action of a drama he finds almost always another dialogue seemingly superfluous yet really that to which the soul listens attentively; and on the quality and extent of this unnecessary dialogue depend the character and inner power of the work. The mysterious and haunting beauty of true tragedy is found in the words that are spoken by the side of the strict and manifest truth—in the words that conform to a truth profounder and incomparably nearer the invisible soul that breathes through the poem. Now I am far from sustaining a theory which would substitute dramas built on any such pseudo-mysticism for the ballads of Kipling. Yet one must confess that he misses in Kipling just this added touch of something deeper than what first meets the ear, and that, missing this, he comes away unsatisfied. We hear Kipling constantly praised for his virility and out-of-door freedom; and this is well. But Homer and Shakespeare, no poets of the closet certainly, were able to combine this liberty with the insight of a profounder spirituality. Our new bard is lauded also for loyalty to the present; and this too is well. Yet Byron found it possible to speak for his own age, and at the same time assimilated largely from what was memorable in the past. In Childe Harold's reflections on Italy and

other scenes of former grandeur, we enjoy the same largeness of release from the fretful constraints of circumstance which in Virgil comes to us from his pensive brooding over Fate. One may indeed question whether any writer so little formed by the traditions of the past as Kipling can, in this day of inherited wisdom, escape the charge of crudeness.

An attentive study of the examples quoted in Matthew Arnold's *Essay on Poetry* might lead one to call this defect in Kipling a lack of the "high seriousness" which that critic adopts as a touchstone of the great style; but the term at least demands definition. Seriousness, if understood as a quality of the emotions, cannot be denied to the author of *The Seven Seas;* it is in fact a marked and distinguishing trait of the Anglo-Saxon race. Nor is the defect due to any weakness of the intellect. The world was never more ready than at the present hour to expend its intellectual force on social or artistic problems; it revels in labour of the sort. As a matter of fact, the peculiarity of Kipling's vocabulary and the continual looseness of his grammar, even apart from the vitality of his thought, render him one of the harder poets to read, yet they in no way detract from his popularity.

The fault lies in another and more essential faculty,—the will; and here again there is need of careful analysis. Any one who looks deeply into his own heart must recognise there two distinct

principles governing his life,—the will to act, and, —let us not say the will to renounce, for fear of misinterpretation,—but rather the *will to refrain;* and on the right understanding of these two faculties depends largely our insight into much that is best and much that is worst in literature. Now no one can read a page of *The Seven Seas* without being struck by its splendid virility: the book is in this respect a faithful reflection of the restless energy impelling the race, by fair means or foul, to overrun and subdue the globe. But in that other and higher will, the will to refrain, the Anglo-Saxons are, and have always been, singularly deficient. To this character must be attributed both the lack of any genuinely mystical literature in England, and the comparative freedom from decadence,—phenomena which, indeed, the true Briton finds far from easy to distinguish one from the other. In fact, much of the confusion of mind in regard to genius and degeneracy, spread abroad over the world by such writers as Lombroso and Max Nordau, is due to the same imperfect analysis. Let the active individual will be weakened by immorality, or whatever cause, and there often arises a dissolution of the personality into a flaccid dream state, which the ordinary observer associates with mysticism, but which is in reality the very opposite of that. Out of the deliquescence of character and loosening of the grip on things actual, such as may be seen in Paul Verlaine and Maeterlinck, springs a sham spirit-

uality that wraps itself in the allurements of the senses. Quite different from this is the mysticism of an Emerson or a Juan de la Cruz or a Plato, where in a strong character the higher will to refrain holds the lower will as a slave subservient to its purpose. The one is the defalcation of the will altogether; the other is the subjection of the lower will to the higher, an exercise of the function which Emerson, quoting I know not what Eastern source, calls the "inner check." The one is but a bewildering illusion; the other is the truest disillusion. I would repeat that the poet is not called to be a mystic,—the sensuous element must always be too predominant in his work for that; and yet only by comparison with genuine mysticism can the recurring note of disillusion in the greater poets be explained. It was probably the voice of this higher personality heard in Dante that led Matthew Arnold to quote his *In la sua voluntade è nostra pace* as an illustration of "high seriousness" in verse.

Kipling is indeed serious, with the strength of his Hebraic spirit; but the general absence of this will to refrain in his work, although it may add to his popularity among a people of restless energy, must effectually exclude him from the band of *sacri vates*. I remember the shock of surprise that came to me when, on first reading *The Seven Seas*, I met the lines,

> For to possess in loneliness
> The joy of all the earth;

so incongruous did the words appear with the bustling spirit of the book as a whole. For the moment I seemed to be rapt away from the society of Tommy Atkins and Mr. McAndrews to the region out of which the inspired poets of old spoke to us. Had Kipling written more in this vein, he would have escaped the charge of superficiality.

But there is something else wanting in Kipling, which may, at the last analysis, be closely akin to this lack of true insight. I mean the seeking after beauty as an end in itself, as an instinct of supreme joy like that which inspired the opening lines of Keats's *Endymion*. In its purer manifestation this element of beauty is but the expression of an inner harmony of the faculties depending on the same will to refrain; it is the law of the Delphian Apollo, *Nothing too much*, working itself out in perfect proportion of thought and form. The very foundation of poetry, as possessing that higher liberty of spirit growing out of the harmony of restraint, lies therein; and such, I gather, was the notion of Coleridge when he traced the source of metre "to the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion." Even in its lower manifestation, in the love of mere beauty of detail as displayed by the lesser romantic writers, there must still remain something of the power to withdraw the mind from the immediate uses of things, and read into them a higher significance. Of this longing after beauty there is

singularly little in Kipling in comparison with the force and breadth of his genius. His most ardent admirers would probably be surprised to find how few passages of real loveliness they could recall in his poems; and it is no doubt this deficiency that inspires Kipling's enemies—and even he has enemies—to speak so contemptuously of his work.

I have attempted thus far to show how the poetry of *The Seven Seas* reflects both the dominant strength and the deficiencies of the Anglo-Saxon temper; there is a curious interest in comparing with it another volume of almost equal popularity, in which all that is un-English might seem to have come to flower. Within the body of the people has sprung up, of late years, a small circle of men to whom the restless activity of the race is strongly repellent: they are quietists and worshippers of pure beauty. The movement began with the pre-Raphaelites, who sought in mediæval Italy all that was wanting in the England about them, and has grown to include an ever widening band of malcontents. For the very reason that they are cut off from the broader sympathies with actual life, there is something inefficient in their work, something very frail and fragile, which we are wont to stigmatise as effeminate or dilettante. Beauty and form are indeed the feminine elements of genius, which, as has been often observed, must embrace both the masculine and the feminine principles to accomplish its best results. Alone and unsupported by the

aggressive virility of thought and action, the love of beauty has always a tendency to degenerate into effeminacy. It is just this flowerlike grace, apart from any sturdier character, that appeals to the class of dilettantes in FitzGerald's translation of the *Rubáiyát*. English poetry contains nothing more exquisitely lovely than such stanzas as this:

> Earth could not answer; nor the Seas that mourn
> In flowing purple, of their Lord forlorn;
> Nor rolling Heaven, with all his Signs reveal'd
> And hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn.

There is in such writing all the apt felicity of Horace, to whom FitzGerald is sometimes likened; but it must be added that there is, on the other hand, too little of the manly tone of Horace, and of his shrewd reflection on life, which have made him the friendly mentor of the centuries.

It might seem at first sight as if the *Rubáiyát* should attract this small coterie alone, were it not further true that there is a touch of the dilettante inherent in the whole race. The very fact that a person has little appreciation of harmony and beauty in their higher manifestation leads him to make a sharp distinction in his taste between what appeals to the reason or dominant emotions and what, under the designation of beauty, is a mere titillation of the fancy. This divorce between the reason and the imagination, due to an original defect of temperament in the race, has been so widened by the exigencies of modern life

that any real synthesis of the powers has become almost impossible. Unwholesome and irrational as it is, the division has entered even into our scheme of education, and in our universities we now see the classical and modern-language faculties separated into semi-hostile groups of pure philologians on the one side, and shallow dabblers in literature on the other; and so impossible is any mediating ground between the two that even when the scholar, who looks down so superciliously on the æsthetes, himself turns by chance to notice literature, we commonly see him fall into the same trifling attitude. Our libraries are flooded with works that have no style or form on the one hand, and with books of style that have no substance on the other. And to this same division in a way is due the almost equal popularity of authors so opposite as Kipling and FitzGerald.

But our English Omar has another claim on our attention besides this mere verbal grace: his work possesses a genuine psychological interest in so far as it reflects a peculiar mood of the day. The band of dilettantes to whom his felicities of style appeal so strongly represent also a marked reaction against the predominance of Anglo-Saxon ideals. To a few men has come an inner awakening after the despotism of the recent scientific period, and a weariness born of enthusiasms that have failed to carry the mind beyond their own restricted circle. Religious faith in the old formulas of salvation has been weighed and rejected

by the scientific spirit of which Renan in France and Huxley in England made themselves the spokesmen. But in the end the new faith has been found no more enlarging and no less dogmatic than the old; and to some the whirl and stress of mechanical progress seem to have taken from life the few things that were really worth possessing. Even the mass of the Anglo-Saxon people, whose strenuous unreflecting minds accepted the doctrine of material advance most eagerly, have begun at last to question dumbly their own enthusiasm. The exultant words of a Kipling still draw them with the force of inspiration, but in their hours of relaxation they can listen to another voice that tells of indifference and repose. Out of the ruin of past ideals no new vision of human spirituality has grown as yet, and no poet has arisen to stir the heart to higher aspirations. Only we listen in our uncertainty to this prophet of disillusion and doubt:

> Alike for those who for To-day prepare,
> And those that after some To-morrow stare,
> A muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries,
> "Fools, your reward is neither Here nor There."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The revelations of Devout and Learn'd
> Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,
> Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep,
> They told their fellows, and to Sleep return'd.

The *Rubáiyát* has often been compared with the Epicurean tone of the *De Rerum Natura*, and

there is no doubt a superficial resemblance. "This too I have seen: how that men recline at table cup in hand, and shadow their brows with garlands, and how they cry out from the depth of their heart, 'Brief is this joy for feeble men; even now it has been, and never again shall we call it to return,'"—sang Lucretius to the Romans; and to-day we read in English verse:

> Then to the Lip of this poor earthen Urn
> I lean'd the Secret of my Life to learn:
> And Lip to Lip it murmur'd—"While you live,
> Drink!—for, once dead, you never shall return."

Yet in spirit the two poems are quite at variance. The work of Lucretius is but a new faith of philosophy, of the *dux vitæ Philosophia*, summoning men to put away their vain, disturbing superstitions, and to conquer for themselves a better and surer peace in strenuous thought; it is at the last the utterance of the *will to refrain* speaking with all the stress of the Roman character. Lucretius would have been the first to repudiate the indifferentism of the Persian:

> Perplext no more with Human or Divine,
> To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign,
> And lose your fingers in the tresses of
> The Cypress-slender Minister of Wine.

The stanzas of the *Rubáiyát* announce the surrender of the will altogether; they speak the creed of defeat, and have little in common with the

mysticism — if I may use that ambiguous word — of the great poets of England and antiquity.

We have still to await the coming of the true modern poet, who shall unite the virility of Kipling and the graceful charm of Omar with a yet deeper note of insight into spiritual truth than has been vouchsafed to either. Meanwhile we cannot but admire the strange fatality that has linked together the restless rover of the seven seas and the gentle "Suffolk dreamer" in their fellowship of fame.

## GEORGE CRABBE

It would be a pleasure to suppose that the new edition of Crabbe in a single volume[1] would at last bring to him that popularity which his lover, FitzGerald, laboured so insistently to create, but any such hope is bound to be frustrate. Here is, in fact, one of the curiosities of literature: that a poet who has been admired so extravagantly by the wisest of England's readers should fail, I do not say of popularity, but even of recognition among critics and historians. For certainly no one would call Crabbe popular, and to realise the neglect of the critics we need only turn to the most sympathetic study of the poet in recent years and read Professor Woodberry's opening words: "We have done with Crabbe." Yet to Byron this was "the first of living poets"; and Byron's epigram, "Nature's sternest painter, yet the best,"— commonly misquoted, by the way,—is on the lips of a host of readers who have never so much as opened a volume of Crabbe's works. Nor was

[1] *The Life and Poetical Works of George Crabbe.* By his son. A new and complete edition. London: John Murray. 1901. Imported by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Byron alone among the great men of that period to reverence what we have elected to forget. On his deathbed Fox called for Crabbe's poems, and in the sorrows of *Phœbe Dawson* found consolation while his life was ebbing away. And of Scott we are told that these same poems were at all times more frequently in his hands than any other work except Shakespeare, and that during his last days at Abbotsford the only books he asked to be read aloud to him were his Bible and his Crabbe. But the true worshipper of our poet's genius was that gentle cynic and recluse, Edward FitzGerald. There is something really pathetic in FitzGerald's constant lamentation that no one reads his "eternal Crabbe." Our English Omar at least is popular, and it looks as if the Suffolk poet were to attain a kind of spurious fame from the way his name is imbedded in the letters of the "Suffolk dreamer."

Now it is superfluous to say that a writer who has been so lauded by the greatest poet, the most ardent orator, the most honoured novelist, and the most refined letter-writer of England in a century, must himself have possessed extraordinary qualities. Yet it remains true that Crabbe is not read, is not even likely to be much read for many years to come; and the reason of this is perfectly simple: his excellences lie in a direction apart from the trend of modern thought and sentiment, while his faults are such as most strongly repel modern taste.

As for the faults of Crabbe, it is enough to say that he is an avowed imitator of Pope in all formal matters, and that the antithetic style of the master too often descends in him to a grotesque flaccidity. It would not be impossible to quote a dozen lines almost as absurd as the parody in *Rejected Addresses*:

> Regained the felt, and felt what he regained.

But even where his style is wrought with nervous energy, it fails to attract an audience who have tasted the rapturous liberties of Shelley and Keats, and who love to take their sentiment copiously in unrestrained draughts. They do not see that the despised heroic couplet permits the narrative poet to condense into a pair of verses the insignificant joinings of a tale which in any other form would occupy a paragraph; nor does it interest them that in the hands of a moral poet the couplet is like a keen two-edged sword to strike this way and that. They are only offended by what seems to them the monotonous seesaw of the rhythm; and a style which opposes an effort of the judicial understanding at every pause in the flow of sentiment repels those who think wit (in the old sense of the word) a poor substitute for celestial inspiration. It is partly a matter of psychology, partly a matter of inscrutable taste, that a generation of readers who are attracted by the slipshod rhythms of *Epipsychidion* or *Endymion* should find the close-knit periods of Crabbe unendurable.

To me personally there is no tedium, but only endless delight, in these mated rhymes which seem to pervade and harmonise the whole rhythm. And withal they help to create the artistic illusion, that wonderful atmosphere, I may call it, which envelops Crabbe's world. No one, not even the most skeptical of Crabbe's genius, can deny that he has succeeded in giving to his work a tone or atmosphere peculiarly and consistently his own. It would be curious to study this question of atmosphere in literature, and determine the elements that go to compose it. Why are the works of Dickens or Smollett or Spenser, to choose almost at random, so marked by a distinctive atmosphere, while in a greater writer, in Shakespeare for example, it may be less observable? Something of bulk is necessary to its existence, for it can hardly be created by a single book or a single poem. A certain consistency of tone is needed, and a unity of effect. It cannot exist without perfect sincerity in the writer; and, above all, there is required some idiosyncrasy of genius, some peculiar emotional or intellectual process in the author's mind, which imposes itself on us so powerfully that when we arise from his works the life of the world no longer seems quite the same to us; for we have learned to see the quiet fields of nature and the thronging activities of mankind through a new medium.

All these qualities, and more particularly this individuality of vision, pervade Crabbe's descrip-

tive passages and his portraits of men. They colour all his painting of inanimate things, but they are most evident, perhaps, in his pictures of the sea, whose varied aspects, whether sublime or intimate, seem to have become, through early association, a part of his sensitive faculties. He has caught the real life of the sea, its calm and tempest or sudden change, as few poets in English have done. Especially he loves the quiet scenes, the beach when the tide retires; when all is calm at sea and on land, and the wonders of the shore lie glittering in the sunlight or the softer light of the moon. Even more characteristic are his pictures of the muddy, oozing shallows, as in that passage where the dull terrors of such a waste are employed to heighten the most tragic of his *Tales :*

When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day,
Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,
Which on each side rose swelling, and below
The dark warm flood ran silently and slow;
There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,
There hang his head, and view the lazy tide
In its hot slimy channel slowly glide;
Where the small eels that left the deeper way
For the warm shore, within the shallows play;
Where gaping mussels, left upon the mud,
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood;—
Here dull and hopeless he 'd lie down and trace
How sidelong crabs had scrawled their crooked race,
Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,
And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,

Gave from the salt ditch side the bellowing boom:
He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice;
Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,
Ran with a dull, unvaried sadd'ning sound;
Where all, presented to the eye or ear,
Oppressed the soul with misery, grief, and fear.

There, if anywhere in English, is the artist's vision, the power to concentrate the mind upon a single scene until every detail in its composition is corroded on the memory, and the skill, no less important, to select and arrange these details to a clearly conceived end.

These lines may serve to exemplify another trait of Crabbe's genius, the rare union of scientific detail with pervading human interest. He was, in fact, all his life a curious and exact student of botany and geology. Even in his old age he kept up these scientific pursuits, and his son, in the excellent biography, tells how the old man on his visits would leave the house every morning, rain or shine, and go alone to the quarries to search for fossils and to pick up rare herbs on the wayside. "The dirty fossils," says the dutiful son, "were placed in our best bedroom, to the great diversion of the female part of my family; the herbs stuck in the borders, among my choice flowers, that he might see them when he came again. I never displaced one of them,"—a pretty picture of busy eld. Of this inanimate lore of plants and rocks Crabbe is most prodigal in his verse, but, by some true gift of the Muses, it never

for a moment obscures the human interest of the narrative. After all, it was man, and the moral springs in man, that really concerned him. As he himself says, the best description of sea or river is incomplete:

> But when a happier theme succeeds, and when
> Men are our subjects and the deeds of men;
> Then may we find the Muse in happier style,
> And we may sometimes sigh and sometimes smile.

Even when he submits his art to minute descriptions, as for instance to a study of the growth of lichens, there still lurks this human ethical instinct behind the scientific eye. Read in their proper place, the following lines are but a little lesson to set forth the associations of mortal antiquity:

> Seeds, to our eyes invisible, will find
> On the rude rock the bed that fits their kind;
> There, in the rugged soil, they safely dwell,
> Till showers and snows the subtle atoms swell,
> And spread the enduring foliage;—then we trace
> *The freckled flower upon the flinty base;*
> These all increase, till in unnoticed years
> The stony tower as grey with age appears;
> With coats of vegetation, thinly spread,
> Coat above coat, the living on the dead:
> These then dissolve to dust, and make a way
> For bolder foliage, nursed by their decay;
> The long-enduring Ferns in time will all
> Die and depose their dust upon the wall;
> Where the winged seed may rest, till many a flower
> Show Flora's triumph o'er the falling tower.

I choose these lines for citation because they form, perhaps, the most purely descriptive passage in Crabbe; and even here it is really the association of generations of mankind with an ancient house of worship that stirs the poet's feelings. For pieces of greater scope one should go to such pictures as the ocean tempest in *The Borough*, which I would not spoil by quoting incomplete. In his study of the Roman decadent poets, M. Nisard has made an elaborate comparison of the storm scenes in the *Odyssey*, the *Æneid*, and the *Pharsalia*, showing the regular increase from Homer down of descriptive matter added for merely picturesque effect, apart from its connection with the human action involved. It would not be easy to find a better example of extended description completely fused with human interest than this tempest in *The Borough*. Every detail of that animated picture is interpreted through human activity and emotion. This does not mean that Crabbe's attitude toward nature is that of an emotional pantheism which uses the outer world as a mere symbol of the soul. Very far from that: the human emotions are in this passage the direct outcome of a sharply defined natural occurrence. In another scene, one that has achieved a kind of fame among critics, he tells the story, in his quiet, satirical manner, of a lover who goes a journey to meet his beloved. The lover's way leads him over a barren heath and a sandy road, but, in his state of exalted expectation, everything that meets

his eye is charged with loveliness. At last he arrives only to find his mistress has gone away,—gone, as he thinks, to see a rival. He follows her, and now his way takes him

> by a river's side,
> Inland and winding, smooth, and full, and wide,
> That rolled majestic on, in one soft-flowing tide;
> The bottom gravel, flowery were the banks,
> Tall willows waving in their broken ranks;
> The road, now near, now distant, winding led
> By lovely meadows which the waters fed.

But all is hideous to his jealous eye. "I hate these scenes!" he cries:

> I hate these long green lanes; there 's nothing seen
> In this vile country but eternal green.

All this is the furthest possible remove from vague reverie; it is a bit of amusing psychology, tending to distinguish more sharply between man and nature rather than to blend them in any haze of symbolism.

It may be imagined from Crabbe's power over details that he should excel in another sort of description, in scenes of still life, which come even closer to the affairs of humanity; and, indeed, there are scattered through his poems little genre pictures that for minuteness and accuracy can be likened only to the masterpieces of Dutch art in that kind. The *locus classicus* (if such a term may be used of so unfamiliar a poet) of this genre writ-

ing is the section of *The Borough* that describes the dwellings of the poor. I cannot refrain from quoting a few of the introductory lines to show how skilfully he prepares the mind for the picture that is to succeed:

> There, fed by food they love, to rankest size,
> Around the dwellings, docks and wormwood rise;
> Here the strong mallow strikes her slimy root,
> Here the dull nightshade hangs her deadly fruit;
> On hills of dust the henbane's faded green
> And pencilled flower of sickly scent is seen.

And this is the poet who has been censured for lack of descriptive powers! Of the scene that follows,—the "long boarded building," with one vast room, where the degraded families of the outcast are huddled together,—no selection can convey anything but the most inadequate impression; it must be read intact, and once read it will cling to the memory forever. Here, at least, is a bit that is as vivid as a picture by Van Ostade, or Teniers:

> On swinging shelf are things incongruous stored,—
> Scraps of their food,—the cards and cribbage-board,—
> With pipes and pouches; while on peg below,
> Hang a lost member's fiddle and its bow;
> That still reminds them how he 'd dance and play,
> Ere sent untimely to the Convicts' Bay.

It must be clear even from these imperfect selections that Crabbe was able to envelop his inanimate world with an atmosphere peculiar to his

own genius. As for the human beings that move through his scenes, if one were given to comparisons, he would probably liken them to the people of Dickens. The comparison is apt both for its accuracy and its limitations. The world of Crabbe is on the surface much like that of Dickens, but examined more closely it is seen to be less pervaded with humour, and more with wit; its pathos, too, is less pungent and firmer, and its moral tone is quite diverse. Save in his later *Tales of the Hall*,—which, after all, are scarcely an exception to the rule,—the characters in Crabbe's poems are taken from the ranks of the humble and poor; they are in external appearance the London folk of Dickens transferred to the country. But they rarely ever descend, like Dickens's portraits, into caricature, for the reason that their divergencies grow more from some inner guiding moral trait, and are less the mere outward distinctions of trick and manner. They are, too, more directly the outcome of divergent individual will; they are, for this reason, more perfectly rounded out in their personality, and they bear with them a more complete sense of moral responsibility for their associations.

We are carried to the green lanes and sandy shores of England, but it is not the land of old poetic illusions. Here are no scenes of idyllic peace, no Corydons murmuring liquid love to Phyllis or Neæra in the shade. I do not mean to imply that the orthodox pastoral dreams are without justi-

fication, for that would be to condemn the central theme of *Paradise Lost*, not to mention a host of minor poems justly beloved. But certainly these dreams lie perilously near to mawkishness and insincerity, and if for no other reason we could admire Crabbe for his manly resistance to their easy allurements. It seems that he set himself deliberately to ridicule and rebuke the common vapidities of that facile school. In those introductory lines to *The Village*, notable chiefly because they were tampered with by Dr. Johnson, he directly satirises the poets—and his master, Pope, was in youth one of the worst sinners in this respect—who imitate Virgil rather than nature. He too had sought the sweet peace and smiling resignation of rural life, but instead he had found only the cry of universal labour and contention:

> Here, wandering long, amid these frowning fields,
> I sought the simple life that Nature yields;
> Rapine and Wrong and Fear usurped her place,
> And a bold, artful, surly, savage race.

An atmosphere of gloom is, indeed, over Crabbe's human world; not moroseness or morbid sentimentality, but a note of stern judicial pity for the frailties and vices of the men he knew and portrayed. His own early life in a miserable fishing hamlet on the Suffolk coast, under a hard father, his starving years of literary apprenticeship in London, and then for a time the salt bread of dependency as private chaplain to the Duke of

Rutland, acquainted him with many sorrows which years of comparative prosperity could not entirely obliterate. He is at bottom a true Calvinist, showing that peculiar form of fatalism which still finds it possible to magnify the free will, and to avoid the limp surrender of determinism. Mankind as a body lies under a fatal burden of suffering and toil, because as a body men are depraved and turn from righteousness; but to the individual man there always remains open a path up from darkness into light, a way out of condemnation into serene peace. And it is with this mixture of judicial aloofness and hungering sympathy that Crabbe dwells on the sadness of long and hopeless waiting, the grief of broken love, the remorse of wasted opportunities, the burden of poverty, the solitude of failure, which run like dark threads through most of his *Tales*. And in one poem, at least, he has attained the full tragic style with an intensity and singleness of effect that rank him among the few master poets of human passion. The story of *Peter Grimes* — his abuse of his old father, his ill-treatment of the workhouse lads brought from London, and his final madness and death — is the most powerful tragedy of remorse in the English language. I have already quoted the picture of the desolate shallows and "the lazy tide in its hot slimy channel" where the wretch sought to hide his guilt; but not less perfect in its art is Peter's own story of the three lonely reaches in the river where the

images of his victims used to rise up and haunt his vision:

"There were three places, where they ever rose,—
The whole long river has not such as those,—
Places accursed, where, if a man remain,
He 'll see the things which strike him to the brain;
And there they made me on my paddle lean,
And look at them for hours;—accursèd scene!"

Then madness struck into his soul:

"In one fierce summer-day, when my poor brain
Was burning hot, and cruel was my pain,
Then came this father-foe, and there he stood
With his two boys again upon the flood:
There was more mischief in their eyes, more glee
In their pale faces, when they glared at me:
Still they did force me on the oar to rest,
And when they saw me fainting and oppressed,
He with his hand, the old man, scooped the flood,
And there came flame about him mixed with blood;
He bade me stoop and look upon the place,
Then flung the hot-red liquor in my face;
Burning it blazed, and then I roared for pain,
I thought the demons would have turned my brain."

But if the atmosphere of these poems is sombre, that does not mean they are without brighter glimpses of joy. As he himself expresses it, they are relieved by "gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose." In fact, Crabbe has contrived to include a vast number of human interests and passions in these simple *Tales*. There are pages of literary satire on the Gothic romances of the day, more neatly executed even than *Northanger Abbey*. There are poems, like the second

letter of *The Borough*, overflowing with tender sentiment; tales such as *Phœbe Dawson*, where the pathos is almost too painful to be easily supported. There are stories of quaint playfulness, like *The Frank Courtship*. Humour, too, is not wanting, and now and then comes a stroke of memorable wit. Jealousy, ambition, pride, vanity, despair, and all the petty tyrannies of conceit are set off with marvellous acuteness. Even abounding joy is not absent. I do not know but the sense of charm, of homely intimate life, of tranquil resignation, is, for all their dark colours, the final impression of these *Tales*. And everywhere they show the delightful gift of the story-teller. Each separate poem is a miniature novel wrought out with unflagging zest and almost impeccable art. The story of the younger brother in *Tales of the Hall* glows again with "the sober certainty of waking bliss"; and the older brother's history begins with a rapturous tide of romantic dreaming that fairly sings and pulses with beauty. The whole of this second story is, in fact, a literary masterpiece, for its scenes of joy, followed by despondency and heroic forbearance, controlled throughout by the unerring psychological instinct of the poet.

But this unerring instinct is not confined to any one tale; it guides the poet in the creation of all his multitudinous characters. At first, perhaps, as we see the ethical motives that underlie a character so clearly defined, it seems the poet is deal-

ing merely with a moral type; but suddenly some little limitation is thrown in, some modification of motive, which changes the character from a cold abstraction to a living and unmistakable personality. Crabbe has been called a realist, and in one sense the term is appropriate; but in the meaning commonly given to the word it is singularly inept. The inner moral springs of character are what first interested him, and his keen perception of manners and environment only serves to save him from the coldness of eighteenth-century abstractions.

I have dwelt at length on these phases of Crabbe's work which would strike even a casual reader, for the sufficient reason that the casual reader in his case scarcely exists. The real problem, as I have already intimated, is to explain why a poet of such great, almost supreme powers should fail to preserve a place in the memory of critics, not to mention his lack of a popular audience. His failure is due in part, no doubt, to the use of a metrical form which we choose to contemn, but chiefly it is due to the fact that he is at once of us and not of us. His presentation of the world is in spirit essentially modern, so that we do not grant him the indulgence unconsciously allowed to poets who describe a different form of society, and whose appeal to us is impersonal and general; while at the same time he ignores or even derides what has become the primary emotion we desire in our literary favourites. Since the advent of Shelley and Wordsworth and the other great

contemporaries of Crabbe our attitude toward nature has altered profoundly. We demand of the poet a minute, almost a scientific acquaintance with the obscurer beasts and flowers; but still more we demand, if the poet is to receive our deeper admiration, a certain note of mysticism, a feeling of some vast and indefinable presence beyond the finite forms described, a lurking sense of pantheism by which the personality of the observer seems to melt into what he observes or is swallowed up in a vague reverie. When we think of the great nature-passages of the century, we are apt to recall the solemn mysteries of Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* or Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind.* Even in poets who are not frankly of the romantic school, and who are imbued with the classical spirit, the same undercurrent of reverie is heard. Matthew Arnold's verse is full of these subtle echoes. It may be caused by a tide of reminiscence which dulls the sharpness of present impressions, as in so simple a line as this:

> Lone Daulis and the high Cephissian vale;

or it may be present because the words are overfreighted with reflection, as in the closing lines of *The Future:*

> As the pale waste widens around him,
> As the banks fade dimmer away,
> As the stars come out, and the night-wind
> Brings up the stream
> Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea;—

but everywhere this note of reverie runs through

the greater modern poets. Now of science Crabbe owned more than a necessary share, but for reverie, for symbolism, for mystic longings toward the infinite, he had no sense whatever. It is quite true, as Goethe declared, that a "sense of infinitude" is the mark of high poetry, and I firmly believe that the absence of this sense is the one thing that shuts Crabbe out of the company of the few divinely inspired singers,—the few who bring to us gleanings from their "commerce with the skies," to use old Ovid's phrase. But it is also true that this sense of infinitude as it speaks in Homer and Shakespeare is something far more sober and rational than the musings of the modern spirit,—something radically different from the ecstatic rhapsodies of Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound;* and Crabbe's very limitations lend to his verse a brave manliness, a clean good sense, that tone up the mind of the reader like a strong cordial.

And there is the same difference in Crabbe's treatment of humanity. Wordsworth, feeling this difference, was led to speak slightingly of Crabbe's "unpoetical mode of considering human nature and society." His repulsion may be attributed in part to Crabbe's constant use of a form of analysis which checks the unconstrained flow of the emotions; but the chasm between the two is deeper than that. Wordsworth was ready to ridicule the sham idyllic poetry as freely as Crabbe or any other; but, at bottom, are not *Michael* and the *Leech-gatherer*, and a host of others that move

through Wordsworth's scenes, the true successors of the Corydons and Damons that dance under the trees on the old idyllic swards? In place of pastoral dreams of peace we hear now "the still, sad music of humanity." Yet it is the same humanity considered as a whole; humanity betrayed by circumstances and corrupted by luxury, but needing only the freedom of the hills and lakes to develop its native virtues; humanity caught up in some tremulous vision of harmony with the universal world; it is, in short, the vague aspiration of what we have called humanitarianism, and have endowed with the solemnities of a religion. If this is necessary to poetry, Crabbe is undoubtedly "unpoetical." In him there is no thought of a perfect race made corrupt by luxury, no vision of idyllic peace, no musing on humanity as an abstraction, but always a sturdy understanding of the individual man reaping the fruits of his own evil-doing or righteousness; his interest is in the individual will, never in the problem of classes. His sharply defined sense of man's personal responsibility coincides with his lack of reverent enthusiasm toward nature as an abstract idea, and goes to create that unusual atmosphere about his works which repels the modern sentimentalist. So it happens, we think, that he can appeal strongly to only a few readers of peculiar culture; for it is just the province of culture or right education—is it not?—that it shall train the mind to breathe easily an atmosphere foreign to its native habit.

# THE NOVELS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

WHEN a novelist's works come to us in a new edition, revised and complete, it is time to consider him seriously as one whose task is accomplished, and to ask what place he holds in the history of fiction; and such a consideration may seem in an especial manner timely in the case of an author like George Meredith,[1] whose novels have elicited such extravagant praise and such sweeping condemnation from different readers. Indeed, I know of nothing much more discouraging than to read in succession the various reviews of Mr. Meredith's works. There appears to be no middle ground between the homage of R. L. Stevenson, to whom *Rhoda Fleming* was "the strongest thing in English letters since Shakespeare died," and the equally excessive detraction of William Watson, who has put on record his impression of *The Egoist* as being "the most entirely wearisome book purporting to be a novel that" he had "ever toiled through in" his "life." And withal few or none of these critics have deemed it necessary to give a rational explana-

[1] *The Works of George Meredith.* 16 vols. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons. 1898.

tion of their opinions. One asks in amazement whether the judgment is utterly and forever to be excluded from criticism by this kind of irresponsible impressionism.

Probably the first characteristic of these novels to attract the attention of even the most heedless reader is the peculiar language employed, one might almost say, with malice prepense. "Our language is not rich in subtleties for prose. A writer who is not servile, and has insight, must coin from his own mint." So Mr. Meredith states his case, and it must be admitted he has coined with a liberal hand, not so much in the formation of new words,—though he is apt to prefer a strange word to a common one,—as in his distortion of language in order to surcharge it with thought and sensation. It is perhaps this peculiarity of style that led an eminent critic to declare his chief fault was inability to tell a story, —rather a grave charge against a story-teller, if it could be substantiated. The construction of a plot like that of *Evan Harrington* may be sufficient answer to such a charge, but it is not so easy to refute the censure of over-cleverness to which his pointed style lays him open.

Mr. Meredith alludes more than once to his own philosophic intentions, and speaks with some irritation of the necessity of disguising his deeper meaning for fear of seeming obscure. We fancy, however, that it is not profundity of reflection on human life which causes obscurity so much as the

refraction of this into innumerable burning points. And herein lies much of the difference between real depth and mere cleverness. In any true sense of the word there is as much depth of reflection in *Henry Esmond* as in *The Egoist;* but the earlier novel is less obscure, because the thought is presented in broad masses, so to speak, which rest the mind while stimulating it, whereas *The Egoist* confuses with its endless clashing epigrams. Mr. Meredith, like his own Mrs. Mountstuart, is "mad for cleverness," and does not stop often enough to remember his judgment on Sir Austin Feverel: "A maker of proverbs—what is he but a narrow mind, the mouthpiece of a narrower?" and, "A proverb is a halfway house to an idea, I conceive." Now, although the highest culture must always demand more repose of mind than an epigrammatist can offer, yet the flippant public is readily caught by a superficial sparkling cleverness, as recent popular novels sufficiently attest, and Mr. Meredith might be expected to attract such an audience, were it not for one grave defect. His cleverness is sparkling, but it is by no means superficial, and such cleverness does not make easy reading. Mr. McCarthy, one of his admirers, has said of the novels that "a man or woman must be really in earnest to care much about them at all." Really, our author seems to be caught between the devil and the deep sea. Yet criticise his style as you will, there is after all a note of sincerity in it, something so naturally

artificial, if the paradox may be pardoned, that we are prone to overlook its extravagances, and can even appreciate its fascination for certain minds. It may be pretty well characterised in his own words as "the puffing of a giant; a strong wind rather than speech."

To Stevenson, Meredith's is the only conversation since Shakespeare. It is a little hard to understand Stevenson's unreasoning enthusiasm for an author who is in every respect a direct contrast to him,—a contrast nowhere more apparent than in the dialogue of these novels. Mr. Meredith's characters all talk Meredith; they are all epigrammatic, and all his fools are wits. This might perhaps be pardoned, if our author had only learned from Shakespeare the further art of making his fools witty and natural at the same time; but it must be confessed that Mr. Meredith too often employs language so artificial as entirely to destroy the illusion. In one respect, however, he has been led by his oblique method of thought into a false kind of realism which a deeper sense of art would have corrected. He says of one of his characters that "she had not uttered words, she had shed meanings"; and this is an admirable description of much of his conversation. To be sure, in real life we are apt to leave our thoughts half expressed, or even to say one thing while another thought is in our mind; but the artist should remember that in actual conversation there are, besides words, a hundred ways of conveying our

meaning which the printed page cannot employ. To produce the same impression, the novelist's language must necessarily be fuller and more explicit than is needed in life, and true realism should recognise this difference. Generally Mr. Meredith leaves his readers to gather this undercurrent of thought as best they may, but in one place he has been kind enough to add a comment to the dialogue, which sets in so clear a light this troublesome source of obscurity that I am tempted to quote the passage in full, though it has already been used for the same purpose. This conversation, then, between Rhoda Fleming and Robert Eccles proceeds as follows:

"I've always thought you were born to be a lady." (You had that ambition, young madam.)

She answered: "That's what I don't understand." (Your saying it, O my friend!)

"You will soon take to your new duties." (You have small objection to them even now.)

"Yes, or my life won't be worth much." (Know, that you are driving me to it.)

"And I wish you happiness, Rhoda." (You are madly imperilling the prospect thereof.)

To each of them the second meaning stood shadowy behind the utterances. And further,—

"Thank you, Robert." (I shall have to thank you for the issue.)

"Now it's time to part." (Do you not see that there is a danger for me in remaining?)

"Good-night." (Behold, I am submissive.)

"Good-night, Rhoda." (You were the first to give the signal of parting.)

"Good-night." (I am simply submissive.)

"Why not my name? Are you hurt with me?"

Rhoda choked. The indirectness of speech had been a shelter to her, permitting her to hint at more than she dared clothe in words.

Again the delicious dusky rose glowed between his eyes.

But he had put his hand out to her, and she had not taken it.

"What have I done to offend you? I really don't know, Rhoda."

"Nothing." The flower had closed.

Here as so often Mr. Meredith has himself furnished the means of criticising him. Indeed, it would be quite practicable to compose a full review of his work by forming a cento of phrases from his own pen. The conversation just quoted has been commended for its high realism, and the praise is not undeserved; but unfortunately the volumes are packed with dialogue of this oblique character, where there is no comment added to guide the bewildered reader. The intellectual labour required for such writing is prodigious; the pity of it is that simpler language would be a higher form of realism, because truer to life as life must be expressed through the novelist's artistic medium. It is in the larger sense an error of style, the same error which has led him to break up his thought into points, and leave the tedium of the intellect everywhere disagreeably manifest. I have called it the substitution of cleverness for true wisdom; and if Mr. Meredith stands far

above the ordinary shrewd writer of the day, it is because he is genuinely clever where others only strive to be so. In the end we are tempted once more to turn against him his own weapon of attack, and quote from *The Egoist:* "You see how easy it is to deceive one who is an artist in phrases. Avoid them, Miss Dale; they dazzle the penetration of the composer. That is why people of ability like Mrs. Mountstuart see so little; they are so bent on describing brilliantly."

One cannot help remarking, in this connection, how few of our English novel-writers are great as stylists. It is a noteworthy fact that any other class of authors — essayists, historians, divines, and even philosophers—can boast a greater number of avowed masters of language. Fielding has a strong virile style, but lacks charm and grace; Sterne is exquisite but capricious; Jane Austen's language is as limpid as still water, and occasionally as biting as acid, but fails in compass; Hawthorne's style is perfect for romance, but scarcely flexible enough for an ordinary novelist's use. Perhaps Thackeray alone can be accounted a master in word-craft, and certainly Meredith is not the least peccant among the brotherhood. For one who desires to penetrate into the secrets of the art, I suppose no better course could be adopted than the careful study of two books, *Henry Esmond* and Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano;* the former being the most perfect specimen among English novels of the science of writing as

cunningly defined by the Italian. I was amazed, recently, to find that not a single copy of Castiglione's famous work was discoverable in a city of six hundred thousand inhabitants; and indeed, Italian literature in general is so little read among us that it may not be amiss to transcribe a sentence or two from *Il Cortegiano*. This work, as the name indicates, is a discussion of the qualities necessary to form a perfect courtier, or, as we should say to-day, gentleman; and in the first book, after dwelling at some length on the need of grace in every action, the dialogue turns aside to touch on the use of language or style, and continues as follows:

Often I have considered in myself whence this grace arises, and, leaving aside those who have received it from the stars, I have discovered one universal rule which more than any other seems to me in this respect to prevail in all things that men do or say: and that is, so far as possible, and as if it were a sharp and perilous rock, to avoid affectation; and, if I may be pardoned the word, to adopt in everything a certain *sprezzatura* [I hardly know how to translate the word; it signifies an easy contempt for the means employed, a sort of gentlemanlike superiority to the results]—a certain *sprezzatura*, which hides the art, and shows that what we say or do is done without fatigue and as it were without taking thought. From this, as I think, springs the highest grace; for every one knows the difficulty of things rare and well done, and in such things a sense of ease produces the greatest wonder; whereas, the display of force and effort destroys the charm and detracts from the honour of things that may be great in themselves. . . .

> Now writing, in my opinion, is only a form of speech which abides after the man has spoken, being an image, or rather the life itself, of his words. Therefore, in spoken language, which is dispersed with the breath that formed it, a certain license is permitted beyond what is allowed in writing; for writing preserves speech, submitting it to the judgment of him who reads and affording time for mature consideration. Hence it is reasonable to employ greater diligence in order that our written language may be pure and elegant, but not to such a degree that it should differ essentially from speech.

Castiglione was an avowed Platonist, and it is probable that his conception of style is based on a study of that philosopher who certainly, more than any other writer of the past or present, succeeded in combining the elements of *grazia* and *sprezzatura*. In reading Thackeray, I have often been struck by a kind of similarity in his use of language to Plato's; there is the same easy conversational tone, which is always graceful, and rarely, even at its loosest, slipshod, and which on the proper occasion can express sentiments of true sublimity without the slightest apparent effort. It is the complete absence of this grace and this *sprezzatura* that renders so much of Meredith uncomfortable and at times even painful reading. And yet it must be confessed that now and again, without losing the peculiar flavour of his style, he is able to produce pages of a strange and haunting beauty that almost atone for chapters of dreary affectation. I have quoted Mr. Meredith in condemnation of himself; scant justice calls for

quotation from that famous scene by the old weir in *Richard Feverel*, withal one of the most enchanting love scenes in our literature:

Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. . . . The little skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude: a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weir-fall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for

the weir, he dared not dip a scull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.

He had landed on an island of the still-vexed Bermoothes. The world lay wrecked behind him : Raynham hung in mists, remote, a phantom to the vivid reality of this white hand which had drawn him thither away thousands of leagues in an eye-twinkle. Hark, how Ariel sang overhead! What splendour in the heavens! What marvels of beauty about his enchanted brows! And, O you wonder! Fair Flame! by whose light the glories of being are now first seen. . . . Radiant Miranda! Prince Ferdinand is at your feet.

I have delayed at some length on this matter of language, because it is really of vital importance, —as vital, for instance, as colour to a painter,—and because in Meredith particularly an appreciation of his style carries with it a pretty general understanding of his work as novelist. There is the same lack of graceful ease, the same laboured ingenuity in his narration and character-drawing.

His characters do not stand forth smoothly or naturally, so that we comprehend them and live with them without effort. We seem to be with the author in his *phrontisterion*, or thinking-shop ;

there is continual evidence of the intellectual machinery by which his characters are created. To some this creaking of the wheels and pulleys is so offensive that they throw away the books in disgust, while others, themselves professional writers in large part, take an actual pleasure in seeing the whole process of construction laid bare before them. We have in Mr. Meredith's works the analytical novel *par excellence*, and it would be hard to exaggerate the contrast between these and the perceptive novel, or novel of manners, of which Thackeray is the great exemplar. There is undoubtedly a certain legitimate joy of the intellect in pure analysis; yet it should seem that in the novel, as in every other form of art, the true master imitates nature more unconsciously, more objectively, if you will. The actions and thoughts of his characters present themselves to his mind as a concrete reality, and so he reproduces them. It is rather the part of the scientist to evoke a character from conscious analysis of motives. I have heard an eminent critic censure Thackeray as shallow, and extol Meredith for his profundity, without perhaps pausing to reflect that the same logic would condemn Shakespeare. Indeed, such a question would resolve itself into a debate over the respective profundity of art and science—surely the idlest of all possible questions. More to the point is it to observe that the highest pleasure, such as comes with a sense of inner expansion, and which art aims above all things to

bestow, is largely dependent on that *sprezzatura* whose lack is felt as much in Mr. Meredith's character study as in his style.

Despite the admirable narrative powers displayed in *Rhoda Fleming* and elsewhere, the same lack of ease is too often manifest in the construction and plot of Mr. Meredith's stories. So difficult is it, for example, to follow the events in the closing chapters of *The Egoist* that the pleasure of a first reading of that inimitable book is considerably diminished. But in the construction of these novels there lurks a deeper error than mere want of facility. We cannot but feel that the author has shown unusual genius in a wrong direction; and in fact, strange as it may seem, any sound criticism of Mr. Meredith must continually reprobate his methods, while at the same time admiring his powers. To this is partly due, no doubt, the extreme divergence of opinion in regard to his work. It is easy to retort, as Mr. McCarthy retorted long ago, that the great advantage of the novel lies in the very fact that it has not been subjected to literary canons, and remains free to follow any direction. Epic has been strangled by epic law; tragedy was for a long time suffocated by the three unities; and so it has been with other branches of literature; but in the novel there is no form admitted to be of itself right or wrong. There is truth in this idea, and the nature of the novel has kept it free from many useless restrictions. Yet, however we may welcome every form

of narration, and even rejoice that novels are not all cast in one mould, still our judgment must distinguish, and must regard one form as higher than another in so far as it is capable of arousing greater and more satisfactory interest in the reader.

Apart from the story of pure adventure, which as a reaction has come into favour of late, but which can never touch the reader's deeper feelings, there have been from the beginning two classes of novels; and, although the terms may be slightly misleading since the rules of prose and poetical narration can never quite coincide, I would distinguish these two classes as the epic and the dramatic. *Tom Jones* is epic in its aim; *Clarissa Harlowe* is dramatic. The two schools still persist side by side, and a clear understanding of their different aims is of prime importance in estimating the works under question.

It is rather a far cry from latter-day fiction to Homer and Sophocles; yet in distinguishing between the aims of epic and dramatic narration one is tempted to appeal to Greek rather than to modern poets, for the very reason that in Greece the various genres were more sharply defined in practice. The theme of the *Iliad* is ostensibly the wrath of Achilles, but in reality the effect of the poem is double. The central theme is heightened and diversified by the picture of its influence on a great series of events, while at the same time a wonderful panorama of war and life is unrolled

before us, to whose varied scenes unity of effect is lent by the main subject. During a considerable portion of the poem Achilles is almost forgotten. No drama remains which deals directly with the quarrel of Achilles and Agamemnon, but from the other dramas of Sophocles it is not hard to conceive how the action would appear on the stage. The attention of the audience would be concentrated throughout on Achilles's passion; the language employed would enhance its intensity; and all the details of life not bearing directly upon it would be omitted. In a sense, the aim of the epic is breadth of view, the aim of tragedy is intensity; the one proposes to offer a large picture of life artistically disposed, the other to express a brief passion or conflict. The drama which should attempt to concentrate its passionate discourse upon such a series of events as those depicted in the epic would be intolerable. It would at once seem out of proportion, for existence is not normally narrowed down to one grand passion, and the throwing of such intense light on the little details of life would affect our emotional nature very much as close confinement would affect the body: we should gasp to be free. Besides keeping out of view the trivial features of life, the tragedy must further idealise by the generalising influence of highly wrought metaphorical language. Compare, for instance, one of Ibsen's plays with *Macbeth*. Ibsen has violated the law of tragedy by descending to trivialities and by using prosaic

language. The result is evident. He affects our emotional nature strongly, more poignantly than Shakespeare; but we lay down such a play as *Ghosts* with a sense of inner suffocation, whereas *Macbeth* gives a feeling of expansion, and so, as Aristotle would say, purges the passions. Ibsen is as false to life as he is to art. Deep emotion in reality tends to evoke general ideas, though in the dumbness of our heart we may need a poet to give them utterance. And all the while the daily trivial events of existence go on about us as it were in another sphere. We are conscious of a great gap between them and our inner experience; and when at intervals the two spheres touch, the shock is like a bitter awakening. Any artist who confounds these regions of experience is false to life and to his art.

And what has this to do with the novel? Everything. Despite its elasticity of form, the novel which would do more than offer the lightest and most transient amusement must in aim be either epic or tragic,—tragic not because of its disastrous *dénoucment* necessarily, but in the way it treats the deeper passions. Now, whatever else fiction may be, its first purpose is to entertain; and its power of entertainment becomes of a higher and more lasting character in so far as it succeeds in enhancing our sense of life and in purging the emotions. *Tom Jones* and the works of that class down to the great novels of Thackeray offer a picture of the large currents of life; the passions

and struggles of the hero are used, like the wrath of Achilles, to give unity to the narrative; and we rise from perusing such books with a feeling of expansion. *Clarissa Harlowe* and its successors, including modern problem novels, follow in part the laws of tragedy. Everything revolves about a single emotion; and the longer and more complicated the plot which the author is able to concentrate upon this one emotion, the more contracting and painful is the result. And this, we maintain, is not an arbitrary question of literary procedure, but a matter of psychology.

In the tragedy proper this sense of expansion is obtained by purging the passions,—by liberating them from the sphere of petty details, and so depersonalising them,—and further by the use of lofty thought couched in language far removed above the speech of daily intercourse. Who ever wept over *Macbeth* or *Antigone?* Indeed, the story is well known that the Athenians actually fined a dramatist for putting on the stage a tragedy which appealed too strongly to their sympathies, and forbade the play ever to be presented again. But the novel which is denied the employment of these tragic means must proceed in another manner. Even more than the epos it must purge the passions by enveloping them in the free current of life, which proceeds serenely on its way untroubled by the anguish and complaints of the individual,—and thus lighten the emotions of their personal poignancy.

Were space at our disposal, it would be possible to analyse in detail each of Mr. Meredith's novels, and show how they turn for their effect to the laws of the drama rather than the epos, and how, in consequence, they leave the reader with a sense of contraction. So, in brief, *Richard Feverel* holds the mind from first to last on a single problem (and that, by the way, a fairly disagreeable one), and every incident is made to bear upon its development. There seems to be but one aspect—the sexual relation—to human life; and this is presented without any of the alleviating circumstances of genuine tragedy. The point is made clear at once by comparison with *Tom Jones* or *Pendennis*, where the infinite variety of human activity is unrolled before us. So too in *The Egoist* a single problem, as the name implies, is studied with unflagging persistence. Not even a complete character, but one predominant trait is made the centre about which all the incidents of the book revolve. The novel is unquestionably a most astounding piece of analytical cleverness, yet is it true to nature? Hardly, we think. The final impression is one of mental and emotional contraction; and however useful such an impression may be in a sermon, it is not altogether amusing in a work of art. Compare the book with *Pride and Prejudice*, where again a single trait in hero and heroine is the central theme, but where this theme is used rather to lend interest to a picture of life, a picture in miniature yet complete in

its way, and the difference is immediately apparent. The one contracts, the other expands. Nor should it be supposed that this difference depends to any large extent on the tragic or non-tragic ending of the plot; although the formal law of the epic demands a peaceful conclusion, and the novel, to give the highest pleasure, would seem to follow the epic rather than the drama in this respect also. Hawthorne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, comes nearer to justifying the employment of the tragic scheme in prose narration than any other English novelist; but to do this he has created a style which carries his book almost out of the region of the novel. He has so subordinated the realistic representation of life to a subtle all-pervading symbolism that his work is properly a romance or prose-poem. That elevation and generalising ideal which the tragedian effects by means of his poetic medium, Hawthorne achieves in part by his inimitable language and in much greater part by putting aside all that close portrayal of life which forms the very substance of the regular novel and by making his people and his plot mere symbols of some inner shadowy mood of the soul. His method is perfectly justified by the results, but one cannot read a page of *The Scarlet Letter* without feeling that the author's purpose and accomplishment are quite different from those of Mr. Meredith or of any regular novelist whose first aim is to portray real life.[1]

[1] As I read over these paragraphs written a number of

So much may be said to explain why a writer of such extraordinary genius as Mr. Meredith fails to produce works of art that can be ranked with the greatest. And we would repeat that these artistic laws which he transgresses are not conventional rules imposed arbitrarily. They are inherent in the medium which the novelist must use; any infraction of them means that the author does not adopt the best and highest method of giving pleasure at his disposal, and his error is more likely to be condoned by the half-informed critic than by the unreflecting reader of native good taste.

In the case of Mr. Meredith the artistic fault is more or less intimately connected with a still deeper error, which concerns his mode of regarding human nature, and which associates him to a certain degree with the naturalists. The weakness of the naturalistic novel has been exposed more than once, but never, perhaps, so exhaustively and competently as by Juan Valera in his *Nuevos Estudios*. Naturalism is an outgrowth or degradation, he would have it, of romanticism. The romantic movement reflected an abnegation of the will as controlled by reason, and a substitution in its place of the emotions guided by the vagaries of fancy. From this untrammelled use

years ago the distinction between the epic and the dramatic novel seems to me essentially just, but incomplete. At another time *Clarissa Harlowe* may furnish the occasion for developing the theory.

of the fancy, naturalism, following in the wake of the materialistic advances of science, turned to the boasted study of reality, thus leaving room neither for the free will nor for the imagination. The novelist, according to Zola, "is one who studies man experimentally, mounting and dismounting piece by piece the human mechanism by which, under the influence of environment, he performs his functions." Here is no account of man as a free agent; his acts are the inevitable outcome of his inherited disposition and surrounding circumstances. As Paul Alexis forcibly expresses it in his book on Zola, "man is, fatally, the product of a particular hereditary temperament, which unfolds itself in a certain physical, intellectual, and moral environment."

It would be neither critical nor just to class Mr. Meredith unreservedly with the naturalists. In many respects he is widely removed from them. Naturalism can flourish only where the audience itself has lost faith in the will-power, and the Anglo-Saxon race is too healthy to permit one of its greatest writers to fall completely under this decadent influence. Nevertheless, it is true that such novels as *Richard Feverel* and *The Egoist* do belong in part to this category. So long as the free will is paramount, a novel tends to depict a full character, and to unfold a picture of life wherein the individual acts upon the world, and the world reacts upon him. So soon as the will is dethroned, the novel tends to become a treatise on

the influence of environment upon character or an analytical study of particular inherited traits of character. Just this has happened in the case of Mr. Meredith. Like his own Captain Baskelett, "the secret of his art would seem to be to show the automatic human creature at loggerheads with a necessity that winks at remarkable pretensions, while condemning it perpetually to doll-like actions." *Richard Feverel* is a long and patiently elaborated monograph on the development of character under peculiar circumstances. Given a lad of normal temper, how will he be affected by a certain systematic course of training? It will be noticed, however, that the modifying influence is here the active personality of his father; we are still a wide step from regarding man as a mere mechanism. Justice will further add that, despite the delicacy of its theme, the book remains perfectly decent throughout. In *The Egoist* a particular trait of character is analysed and expatiated on with vast ingenuity and, it must be confessed, rather tedious monotony. Indeed, the ordinary fault of naturalism is its lack of interest, so that we see the genuine naturalists constantly seeking to attract readers by all sorts of illegitimate allurements of the animal senses. Juan Valera curtly asks: "How can such novels interest, when they present a temperament, and not a character; a mere machine which moves in obedience to physiological laws?"

Mr. Meredith is again far from portraying man

from the purely physiological point of view, although parts of *Richard Feverel* and others of his novels do approach perilously near this view, and always there is in him a tendency to confuse things of the body and of the spirit. This is seen in his treatment of love and women, and more generally in his analysis of the emotions. Now, apart from the bald statement that a character feels such and such an emotion, the novelist has at command two modes of description,—conversation and physical action. Readers of Plato will remember that philosopher's scathing denunciation of the poets, and of Homer in particular, because of their portrayal of passion by means of physical attributes. Their heroes weep, rend the hair, roll on the ground, and give way to other demonstrations which excite the critical Athenian's scorn. Plato in this is consistent, for his dismissal of the poets is but a part of his sweeping condemnation of art in general, in so far as art must depend on the body for its power of expression. There is undoubtedly in all art an insidious lurking danger, which, as Plato clearly sets forth, lies in its tendency to relax the moral fibre by translating things spiritual into corporeal symbols. If this be true, we ought to be more jealous of any false encroachment of physical methods into its realm; for there is a right and a wrong method, and unfortunately Mr. Meredith has not always kept in the narrow path. Physical actions, which are under control of the will and thus remain to

a great extent voluntary, are legitimate ; physical states, which do not depend on the free agency of the individual, must be used with a sparing hand, for frequent recurrence to such means of expression at once tends to confuse the spirit with the body, and to offer us the study of a temperament in place of true characterisation. This pathological mode of description is distinctly a sin of modern times, culminating in the nauseous abuse of the naturalists. It would be easy to take all the great emotions of the heart,—fear, revenge, love, jealousy, hate, rage, despair,—and show how differently they are treated in this respect by Fielding or Thackeray and by writers of the modern school. Here again the translation of these passions into physical acts that depend on the energy of the will leaves us with a sense of expansion and mental relief, whereas the pathological method disturbs and contracts. I cannot emphasise this truth better than by quoting several brief passages from Meredith, and allowing them to speak for themselves. So he says of one of his characters : " His head throbbed with the hearing of a heavy laugh, as if a hammer had knocked it." Elsewhere : "His natural horror of a resolute man, more than fear, made him shiver and gave his tongue an acid taste." And again: " Emilia thought of Wilfrid in a way that made the vault of her brain seem to echo with jarred chords." It is not, of course, the occasional recourse to such means which is objectionable, but

their perpetual use. Every one will admit with our novelist that "we are all in submission to mortal laws," but a stauncher belief in the power of the will hesitates to accept his declaration that "our souls are hideously subject to the conditions of our animal nature!"

In one respect Mr. Meredith has carried this passive physical expression to a fantastic extremity, which I mention as much for its amusing absurdity as for its real significance. Apparently he has found a new seat of all the emotions: this is no longer the heart, or the Biblical bowels, or the brain, but—the eyelids. Let me justify the statement by quotations: "Hurt vanity led Wilfrid to observe that the woman's eyes dwelt with a singular fulness and softness void of fire, a true ox-eyed gaze, but human in the fall of the eyelids." "She had reddened deliciously, and therewith hung a dewy rosy moisture on her underlids." "We are creatures of custom. I am, I confess, a poltroon in my affections; I dread changes. The shadow of the tenth of an inch in the customary elevation of an eyelid!" These are not isolated cases. After a while one begins to believe that hope, fear, humour, love, hate, anger, horror, friendship, cunning, timidity, modesty,—all the passions of human nature are bound up with the flutter of an eyelid. It is the very *ad absurdum* of passive physical description.

Mr. Meredith's psychological attitude may be further traced in his characterisation of women.

It is, in fact, noteworthy that the present race of novelists are wont to take more interest in, and succeed better with, their feminine than their male characters. But here we tread on perilous ground. After all that has been written by women on the failure of the masculine mind to grasp the subtleties of the female heart, what man is rash enough to step forward as a judge? Fortunately for me, a clever woman has settled the matter. Miss Adeline Sargent has left on record that "George Meredith is one of the few novelists of any age or time who see not only man but woman as she is." Strange that, after such an avowal, she should object so vehemently to Mr. Meredith's psychological analysis of woman! We may perhaps explain the discrepancy by supposing that he depicts women as they are, though not as they are to be. But let us hear Miss Sargent again. She quotes from Meredith as follows: "Women have us back to the conditions of the primitive man, or they shoot us higher than the topmost star. But it is as we please. Let them tell us what we are to them: for us, they are the back and front of life: the poet's Lesbia, the poet's Beatrice, ours is the choice. They are to us what we hold of best or worst within." Miss Sargent's comment on this theory is naïve: "In these sentences there is an assumption of woman's want of consciousness or want of volition in the matter." So delicate is this subject that I may be pardoned for again taking refuge behind authorities,— this

time a man, but a man of the most feminine genius. Mr. Le Gallienne is enthusiastic in his praise of our novelist, as will be seen: "In his delineation of them [women] his fearless adoption of the modern conception of the unity of body and spirit finds its poetry. No writer with whom I am acquainted has made us so realise 'the value and significance of flesh,' and spirit as the flower of it. In his women we seem to see the transmutation in process." It is in the last analysis just because Mr. Meredith discovers this "want of volition" in human nature, and adopts so fearlessly this "modern conception of the unity of body and spirit," that his feminine characters are complete; whereas his studies of men, though wonderfully keen and incisive, always leave something to be desired. Clara Middleton and Diana, with their feverish attempt at revolt, and their final succumbing in marriage with a character of placid but undeveloped strength, are perhaps his most perfect creations. But I hasten to take leave of this perilous subject, and with it of Mr. Meredith.

In the end, I see that my criticism, whatever its value, has been almost entirely destructive; yet I would not leave this as the final impression. In spite of the error of his methods, Mr. Meredith is a writer of extraordinary and, to me at least, fascinating genius. If he cannot stand with the three great novelists who were almost his contemporaries, this is due rather to perversion than to

feebleness of wit; and at the least he ranks far above the common herd. One might say of him, distorting Gray's familiar line,—

> Above the good how far—but far beneath the great.

There are many reasons, and alas that it should be so, for believing that the novel, like other literary forms in the past, has reached its highest perfection and is already declining in excellence. Mr. Meredith, if compared with Thackeray and his peers, shows only too clearly a decadent tendency; yet what a treasure of enjoyment his wit and imagination have left to the world! And so refreshing at times is his obstinate originality that one is almost tempted, when reflecting on the tameness of lesser men, to extol his faults as added virtues.

# HAWTHORNE: LOOKING BEFORE AND AFTER

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE was born just one hundred years ago, and, by a happy coincidence, the one artist who worked in materials thoroughly American and who is worthy to take a place among the great craftsmen of the world celebrates his nativity on the birthday of the nation.[1] By something more than a mere coincidence he lived and wrote at the only period in the history of the country which could have fostered worthily his peculiar genius; he came just when the moral ideas of New England were passing from the conscience to the imagination and just before the slow, withering process of decay set in. As I read his novels and tales to-day, with the thought of this centenary in my mind, the inevitable comparison arises with what preceded and what exists

[1] On the Fourth of July, 1904, the centenary of Hawthorne's birth was celebrated at Salem, Mass., at Bowdoin College and elsewhere. I was asked to write something in commemoration of the season for the *Independent*, and it seemed appropriate to consider Hawthorne's work historically, as the central point of a long development in New England literature.

now; he stands as a connecting link between old Cotton Mather and—*magna cum parvis*—Mary Wilkins Freeman, and only by looking thus before and after can one get a clear idea of his work.

It seldom happens, in fact, that the history of a country shows so logical a development as that represented by these three names. To look backward, almost all of Hawthorne may be found in germ in the group of ecclesiastical writers among whom Cotton Mather rises pre-eminent, and he in turn is but a spokesman of that half-civilisation which migrated across the Atlantic under the pressure of the Laudian persecutions. I say half-civilisation, for the beginnings of New England took place when the mother country was split, as no people in the world ever before was divided, not by sectional but by moral differences into two hostile parties; nor do we always remember how largely the brilliant flowering and quick decay of New England depend on this incompleteness of her origins. Especially is this true in literature. Read through the critical essays that were written in the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages and you will be struck by the fact that the most serious debate was whether poetry had any right to exist at all. That discussion, of course, is as old as Plato and was taken up by the Italians of the Renaissance as part of their classical inheritance. But in England the question was not academic, but vital; it came to the actual test of battle. As

early as 1579, in the very first bloom of that "perpetual spring of ever-growing invention," Stephen Gosson dedicated to Sir Philip Sidney his *School of Abuse*, which he aptly describes as "an invective against poets, pipers, players, jesters, and such-like caterpillars of a Commonwealth." "The fathers of lies, pipes of vanity, and schools of abuse," to use another of the crabbed Gosson's phrases, remained snugly in the mother country, along with those who thought it possible to worship God with the homage of the imagination, who made of religion, in fact, a fine sense of decorum in the ordering of the world. The wonder might seem to be that any literature at all ever sprang from the half-civilisation that came to New England, or that any sense of art found root among a people who contemned the imagination as evil and restricted the outpouring of emotion to the needs of a fervid but barren worship. The root was indeed long in coming to flower, yet there are passages in the *Magnalia* of Cotton Mather both magnificent in themselves and indispensable for a right understanding of what was to follow. There is, for example, that famous account of the death of John Cotton, worthy of repeated quotation:

> After this in that *study*, which had been *perfumed* with many such *days* before, he now spent a *day* in secret *humiliations* and *supplications* before the Lord; seeking the special assistances of the Holy Spirit, for the great work of dying, that was now before him. What glorious

*transactions* might one have heard passing between the Lord Jesus Christ, and an excellent servant of his, now coming unto him, if he could have had an *hearing place* behind the *hangings* of the chamber, in such a day! But having finished the duties of the day, he took his leave of his beloved *study*, saying to his consort, *I shall go into that room no more!*

That is the positive side of the ideal, and it is a dull heart to-day that can read this story of rapt holiness without a thrill of wonder and admiration. But the negative side is close at hand. The same annalist records of another of his family, Nathaniel Mather, a little incident that shows how inveterate was the suppression of the easy enjoyments and emotions of life. The quotation is from Nathaniel's diary:

When very *young* I went astray from God, and my mind was altogether taken with *vanities* and follies; such as the remembrance of them doth greatly abase my soul within me. Of the manifold sins which then I was guilty of, none so sticks upon me, as that being very young, I was *whittling on the Sabbath-day;* and for fear of being seen, I did it behind the door. A great reproach of God! a specimen of that *atheism* that I brought into the world with me!

One may be inclined to smile, perhaps, at this early intrusion into sacred literature of the Yankee's proverbial trick of whittling, but he will be more apt to marvel at the austerity of a discipline which could associate such a childish escapade with life-long remorse. It is not strange that

melancholy hovered over that chosen land. To quote from the *Magnalia* once again:

> There are many men, who in the very constitution of their *bodies*, do afford a *bed*, wherein busy and bloody *devils*, have a sort of lodging provided for them. . . . 'T is well if *self-murder* be not the sad end, into which these hurried people are thus precipitated. *New England*, a country where *splenetic* maladies are prevailing and pernicious, perhaps above any other, hath afforded numberless instances, of even *pious people*, who have contracted those *melancholy indispositions*, which have unhinged them from all service or comfort; yea not a few persons have been hurried thereby to lay *violent hands* upon themselves at the last. These are among the *unsearchable judgments* of God!

It is not fanciful, I think, to find in these three passages from the greatest of the early New England divines the ideas that were in due time to blossom into a true and peculiar literature. That isolation from the world and absorption in an ideal that signalised the death of John Cotton were to leave an echo in many lives through the following years. Nor did the inability to surrender to the common expansive emotions of human nature and the dark brooding on damnation utterly die out when the real cause ceased to act. They changed, but did not pass away. When, with the coming of the nineteenth century, the fierce democracy of those Northern States asserted itself against priestly control and at the same time shook off the bondage of orthodoxy, it only moved

the burden from one shoulder to the other, and the inner tyranny of conscience became as exacting as the authority of the Church had been. But this shifting of the centre of authority from without to within was at least fruitful in one important respect: it brought about that further transition from the conscience to the imagination which made possible the only serious literature this country has yet produced. In that shift from the conscience to the imagination lies the very source of Hawthorne's art. The awful voice of the old faith still reverberates in his stories of New England life and gives them their depth of consciousness; the dissolution of the commands of a sectarian conscience into the forms of a subtle symbolism lifts them from provincial importance merely to the sphere of universal art.

Nor is it at all difficult to follow the religion of the seventeenth into the art of the nineteenth century. In an earlier essay on *The Solitude of Nathaniel Hawthorne* I pointed out—what must be plain to every reader of that author—the central significance of his *Ethan Brand* in the circle of his works. So manifestly do the doctrines of Cotton Mather stalk through that tale under the transparent mask of fiction that it might almost seem as if Hawthorne had taken the passages just quoted from the *Magnalia* as a text for his fancy. For the first quotation, in place of the rigid theologian "perfuming" the bleak atmosphere of his study with meditations on the great work of dying

orthodoxly, we have Ethan Brand, the lime-burner, dwelling in the fragrant solitude of the mountains, watching his kiln through the long revolutions of the sun and the stars, perplexing his mind with no problem of predestination and free-will, but with the meaning of life itself, with its tangle of motives and restraining intelligence. For the second quotation, in place of remorse over one act of surrender to impulse against the arbitrary dictates of religion, we have a strange reversal of Puritan faith through the lens of the imagination. Ethan Brand returns to his long-abandoned lime-kiln after wandering over the world, bringing with him the sense that he has sought and found at last in his own heart the Unpardonable Sin, the sin of banishing from the breast all those natural, spontaneous emotions in the pursuit of an idea. He bears the mark, not of an artificial atheism, like that which abased the soul of the young divine, but of that ananthropism (if I may use the word) which was the real sin of New England, symbolised by the strange nature of his successful search. "He had lost his hold of the magnetic chain of humanity. He was no longer a brother-man, opening the chambers or the dungeons of our common nature by the key of holy sympathy, which gave him a right to share in all its secrets; he was now a cold observer, looking on mankind as the subject of his experiment." There lies the tragedy not of Ethan Brand alone, but of the

later New England. The dogmas of faith had passed away and left this loneliness of an unmeaning idealism; the enthusiasm which had trampled on the kindly emotions of the day has succumbed, and the contempt of the human heart has given place to this intolerable loneliness.

And last of all there is the "splenetic malady," the melancholy that pursues this thwarting of nature and drives the wanderer to lay violent hands on himself. The burning of Ethan Brand in the lime-kiln, within the circle of whose crimson light he had pondered the Unpardonable Sin, is not, in the sense of Cotton Mather, one of the unsearchable judgments of God, but a cunningly devised symbol of literary art.

This is the second act of the New England drama, and the third proceeds from it as naturally as the second proceeded from the first. From the religious intolerance of Cotton Mather to the imaginative isolation of Hawthorne and from that to the nervous impotence of Mrs. Freeman's men and women, is a regular progress. The great preacher sought to suppress all worldly emotions; the artist made of the solitude which follows this suppression one of the tragic symbols of human destiny; the living novelist portrays a people in whom some native spring of action has been dried up, and who suffer in a dumb, unreasoning inability to express any outreaching passion of the heart or to surrender to any common impulse of the body. It is true, of course, that Mrs. Freeman

describes only a single phase of New England character, just as Hawthorne did before her; but the very genealogy of her genius shows that she has laid hold of an essential trait of that character, and, indeed, it needs but little acquaintance with the stagnant towns of coast and mountains to have met more than one of the people of her books actual in the flesh. Her stories are not tragic in the ordinary sense of the word; they have no universal meaning and contain no problem of the struggle between human desires and the human will, or between the will and the burden of circumstances. They are, as it were, the echo of a tragedy long ago enacted; they touch the heart with the faint pathos of flowers pressed and withered in a book, which, found by chance, awaken the vague recollection of outlived emotions. They are very beautiful in their own way, but they are thoroughly provincial, just as the treatises of Cotton Mather were provincial; they have passed from the imagination to the nerves.

Already in Hawthorne we find the beginnings of this strangely repressed life. Hepzibah Pyncheon, struggling in an agony of shame and impotence to submit to the rude contact of the world, is the true parent of all those stiffened, lonely women that haunt the scenes of Mrs. Freeman's little stage. Only there is this signal difference: poor, blighted Hepzibah is part of a great drama of the conscience which in its brooding over the curse of ancestral sin can only be compared with

the Atë of the Æschylean theatre. All the characters that move within the shadow of that *House of the Seven Gables* are involved in one tragic idea assimilated by the author's imagination from the religious inheritance of the society about him —the idea that pride, whether worldly or unworldly, works out its penalty in the separation of the possessor from the common heart of humanity. But in Mrs. Freeman's tales this moral has utterly vanished; they have no significance beyond the pathos of the lonely desolation depicted. Her first book, *A Humble Romance*, is made up of these frustrate lives, which are withheld by some incomprehensible paralysis of the heart from accepting the ordinary joys of humanity, and her latest book, *The Givers*, appeals to our sympathy by the same shadow of a foregone tragedy.

Very characteristic in the first book is the story of the *Two Old Lovers*. There was nothing to keep them apart, none of the well-used obstacles of romance in the shape of poverty or tyrannous parents or religious differences or an existing alliance—nothing save the ingrown inability of the man to yield to the simple call of his own bosom. For many years he visits the girl and, as time passes, the aged woman, as an accepted but curiously undemonstrative lover. There is, to me at least, a pathos like the nightly memory of tears in the watchfulness of the waiting woman over her diffident wooer;

She saw him growing an old man, and the lonely, uncared-for life that he led filled her heart with tender pity and sorrow for him. She did not confine her kind offices to the Saturday baking. Every week his little house was tidied and set to rights, and his mending looked after. Once, on a Sunday night, when she spied a rip in his coat, that had grown long from the want of womanly fingers constantly at hand, she had a good cry after he had left and she had gone to her room. There was something more pitiful to her, something that touched her heart more deeply, in that rip in her lover's Sunday coat, than in all her long years of waiting. As the years went on, it was sometimes with a sad heart that Maria stood and watched the poor lonely old figure moving slower than ever down the street to his lonely home; but the heart was sad for him always, and never for herself.

Only in the end, when he lies dying in his solitary house and she is summoned to his bedside, does the approach of the great silence of death unlock the dumbness of his breast:

He looked up at her with a strange wonder in his glazing eyes. "Maria"—a thin, husky voice, that was more like a wind through dry cornstalks, said—"Maria, I 'm dyin', an'—I allers meant to—have asked you—to—marry me."

Is it fanciful to say that this story has the shadowy pathos of emotions long ago fought against and overcome? The tragedy of New England came when Hawthorne wrought the self-denial of the ancient religion into a symbol of man's universal isolation, when out of the deliberate contemning of common affections he

created the search for the Unpardonable Sin. In the pages of Mrs. Freeman we hear only an echo, we revive a fading memory, of that sombre tragedy. *Ethan Brand* was a problem of the will, a question of morality; the tale of the *Two Old Lovers* is a sad picture of palsied nerves.

The latest volume of Mrs. Freeman's sketches treats the same theme, with this difference, however, that here it is the woman who abandons her lover for many years, returning to him only when both are grown old and past the age of spontaneous pleasures. There is perhaps some softening of tone, a kindlier feeling that into this strange desolation of the heart some consolation of the spirit may descend with chastened joy. Hardly in the earlier books, I think, will one find any picture of the possible mellowing effect of solitude comparable to this description of the waiting lover:

> He was a happy man, in spite of the unfulfilled natural depths of his life. His great sweetness of nature had made even of the legitimate hunger of humanity a blessing for the promoting of spiritual growth. It had fostered within him that grand acquiescence which is the essence of perfect freedom.

But beautiful as this *grand acquiescence* may be, it is not in that direction lies the real freedom of New England life or literature. Rather shall the deliverance come in the way hinted at in that other phrase, the *hunger of humanity*. The whole

progress from Cotton Mather to Mrs. Freeman was determined by the original attempt to stamp out that legitimate hunger for the sake of an all-absorbing pride of the spirit. And now, when the spirit, after having been victorious in the long warfare, has itself starved away and left the barrenness of a dreary stagnation, the natural reversal may well be looked for, and we may expect the hunger of humanity to grow up out of the waste, untempered by spiritual ideals. Already in the New England of Hawthorne, in the exaggerated sentimentalism of the abolitionists and a thousand other reforming sects, this movement had begun. Hawthorne himself, despite his humorous insight and his aloofness from the currents of life about him, did not wholly escape its influence. Through the dark pages of *The House of the Seven Gables* moves the hopeful figure of young Holgrave, the daguerreotypist. To him, says Hawthorne, thinking no doubt of the burden that weighed on his own imagination, it seemed "that in this age, more than ever before, the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses buried, and everything to begin anew." There is a world of significance in the analysis which follows of Holgrave's restless and ardent nature, of his generous impulses, that might solidify him into the champion of some practical cause. He is the type of a whole race of men who were to take revenge on the despotism

of the spirit by casting it out altogether for the idealised demands of the hunger of humanity.

But what was foreshadowed in Hawthorne becomes the one dominant human note of Mrs. Freeman's stories, heard through the desert silence that otherwise encompasses her characters. This vision of a growing humanitarianism that shall awaken new motives for healthy, active life and feed the hunger of the heart is the real theme of the best of her novels, *Jerome*. There is a scene in that book where the hero, beaten and marred by hard circumstance, suddenly gives vent in his awkward, unschooled manner to the late-born recalcitrance against the tyranny of Providence:

> What was it to the moon and all those shining swarms of stars, and that far star-dust in the Milky Way, whether he, Jerome Edwards, had shoes to close or not? Whether he and his mother starved or not, they would shine just the same. . . . He was maddened at the sting and despite of his own littleness in the face of that greatness. Suddenly a wild impulse of rebellion that was almost blasphemy seized him. He clinched a puny fist at a great star. "Wish I could make you stop shinin'," he cried out, in a loud, fierce voice; "wish I could do somethin'!"

And then, later, comes the companion scene, again under the cold eyes of the heavens, when the final determination takes shape before him and he sees at last the work which the world holds for him:

> A great passion of love and sympathy for the needy and oppressed of his kind, and an ardent defence of

them, came upon Jerome Edwards, poor young shoemaker, going home with his sack of meal over his shoulder. Like a bird, which in the spring views every little straw and twig as toward his nest and purpose of love, Jerome would henceforth regard all powers and instrumentalities that came in his way only in their bearing upon his great end of life.

We have followed the development of that half-civilisation which moulded New England from the religious enthusiasm of Cotton Mather, through the tragic art of Hawthorne, down to the pathetic paralysis portrayed in these stories of a living writer. We have seen a morbid spirituality, spurning the common nourishment of mankind, slowly starve itself into impotence. Now, as the hunger of humanity begins to assert itself unhampered by any vision beyond its own importunate needs, are we to behold a new ideal create in turn another half-civilisation, blindly materialistic as its predecessor was harshly spiritual? That question may not be lightly answered. Only it is clear that, for the present, the way of growth for the literature of New England lies through the opening of this door of strictly human sympathies.

## DELPHI AND GREEK LITERATURE

THE wise Greek was taught to judge the poets of his land according to their influence on character, and to ask first whether they made men better in the cities. Only with Aristotle, when poetry ceases to be an organic part of civic life, do we find criticism that approaches the dreary canon of "art for art's sake." So keen indeed was this sense of moral responsibility that Homer himself did not escape frequent censure for his picture of the easy-living gods, and Plato, recalling complacently "the ancient difference between philosophy and poetry," would banish the singers from his ideal state. Even the analytic mind of the Greeks had not effected a divorce between ethics and æsthetics; and on our part we may assume that a true appreciation of the circumstances under which their literature arose, and of the influence it exercised on this beauty-loving people, as indeed any sound criticism of the literature itself, must start from a sufficient study of the ethical ideas it sought to convey.

It may be surmised at the outset of such a study that Homer and his successors are pre-eminent artists, not by reason of form alone, but because

they also embody more truth, more wise reflection —in short, because they present a fairer criticism of life—than is readily to be found elsewhere. It is a contradiction that Homer and Sophocles should be reckoned unsurpassed as poets, and their views of life be regarded as immature and incapable of instruction for our more experienced age. Better were it to accept at once the standard of Greece, and judge by their ethical import the poets she was wont to honour as sages. If encouragement were needed for examining these ancient works with such seriousness, it might be found in the supposition that in our own land no important revival, or shall we say creation, of literature is likely to arise except from a renascence of interest in Greek; and that further such a study may throw a curious light on the religious and moral confusion now troubling our minds. For we have "traversed many paths in the wanderings of thought," and like Odysseus of old have reached an Ææan island, where we know neither the rising nor the setting of the sun and doubt if there be any counsel for us. We, too, like the companions of Odysseus, may meet with some Circe to change us into bestial shapes, unless a god intervene with help.

Granted then that Greek literature owes its excellence largely to its ethical content, the question first arises: Was there any one precept, any one phase of moral truth, so constantly before the people as to become a master law to which the

particular rules of conduct may be referred back, and of which literature and art may be regarded as the manifold expression? Now it was the established custom of the Greeks themselves, when about to undertake a hazardous voyage of conquest or discovery, to consult the oracle of Apollo at Delphi. The gifts through centuries of grateful kings and states had made Delphi one of the great treasure houses of the world. So numerous were the works of art collected here, that even after the depredations of Sulla and Nero it still displayed three thousand statues in the time of Pliny; and in the days of its glory it must have delighted the religious pilgrim with more beauty than can be seen now in all the galleries of Europe. The spot was well chosen for the oracle of Greece. We may imagine the traveller, anxious at heart perhaps with the question he was to propound, climbing up the mountain side from Cirrha on the gulf, or winding westward along the inland road that followed the valley of the Pleistus. He had been taught to regard the high hills as the peculiar dwelling-place of the gods, and to believe that each globe of mist hovering on a lonely summit might veil the bodily presence of a divinity. The wild scenery of Parnassus, with its misty hollows and twin peaks rising into the sky, was calculated to exalt his religious mood to a state of reverent enthusiasm. It was remarked that even the atmosphere of the place had a peculiarly subtile,

biting quality which affected strangely the bronze of statuary; and this may have been a physical stimulus to the mind also. What must have been the feeling of admiration when the temple with its marble front first came into view. Euripides in one of his most exquisite scenes represents a band of Athenian women coming to the shrine in the early dawn. Ion, the child of Apollo and dedicated from birth to the service of the god, is seen sweeping with laurel boughs the vestibule and sprinkling the pavement with lustral water brought in golden pitchers from the Castalian fount. Now with threatening arrows he drives away the polluting birds that would nest under the eaves, and again and again he cries out in joy,—

> O Pæan, Pæan, thou from Leto sprung,
> Forever be thou blest, forever young!

The chorus of Athenian women appears winding up toward the temple. They are rapt in wonder at the rich scene unfolded before them: one after another they point to the statues of Hercules slaying the Hydra while Iolaus stands by with kindled torch; of Bellerophon on the winged horse, smiting the monstrous Chimæra; of the gods engaged in battle with the giants. To behold this unravaged beauty with the Athenian women under the morning sky must have been a joy such as the modern world can hardly equal.

If we had undertaken to enter into the temple,

we should have been met at the threshold by the greeting of the god. It is recorded that on the columns were inscribed the wisest proverbs of the land; and these were taken to be Apollo's welcome to his visitor. Several of these sentences we know, and two of them are distinguished by later writers as of the deepest import to Greek philosophy. So Plutarch somewhere alludes to them. "Consider," he says, "these inscriptions, *Know thyself* and *Nothing too much;* how many philosophical discussions they have called forth, and how great a multitude of words has sprung from each as from a seed." Plato was never tired of quoting them; especially in the *Charmides* he weaves them into his argument on temperance with admirable skill (164 D; Jowett): "And in this I agree with him who dedicated the inscription, 'Know thyself!' at Delphi. That word, if I am not mistaken, is put there as a sort of salutation which the god addresses to those who enter the temple; as much as to say the ordinary salutation of 'Hail!' is not right, and that the exhortation 'Be temperate!' would be a far better way of saluting one another. The notion of him who dedicated the inscription was, as I believe, that the god speaks to those who enter his temple not as men speak; but, when a worshipper enters, the first word he hears is 'Be temperate!' This, however, like a prophet he expresses in a sort of riddle, for 'Know thyself!' and 'Be temperate!' are the same, as I maintain, and as the letters im-

ply, and yet they may be easily misunderstood; and succeeding sages who added 'Nothing too much,' or 'Give a pledge, and evil is nigh at hand,' would appear to have so misunderstood them; for they imagined that 'Know thyself!' was a piece of advice which the god gave, and not his salutation of the worshippers at their first coming in; and they dedicated their own inscription under the idea that they too would give equally useful pieces of advice." So far the *Charmides;* elsewhere Plato writes (*Protag.*, 343 B): "And they [the seven Sages] met together and dedicated in the temple of Apollo at Delphi, as the first-fruits of their wisdom, the far-famed inscriptions, which are in all men's mouths, 'Know thyself' and 'Nothing too much.'" We have come to the god for instruction; let us accept his words of salutation for the advice desired. If Apollo may be trusted, in these two brief commands we shall find a sure guide for our proposed study.

Fortunately we need not stop here to discuss the authorship of these apothegms. They were ascribed to various members of the fabulous guild of Sages, or even to a period antedating that august body. Indeed, there was a tradition, fostered no doubt by the priests, that Apollo himself was the author of "Know thyself." At any rate the guardians of the oracle, by writing the words on the temple, had assumed the responsibility of them for the god.

Neither is their significance hard to discover.

"Nothing too much" is the rule of outward conduct. It does not say, This thou shalt do, and that thou shalt not do; but rather in the words of Saint Paul, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Evil, accordingly, is not essentially inherent in particular acts; but the carrying of any act to excess is transgression; failure to strike the true mean is error; and we shall find that transgression or error is rebuked as due more often to ignorance than to malevolence. Evil is commonly regarded not as sin committed wilfully against divine law, but as harm done to self or to the community by ill-regulated conduct. In manners this leads easily to the ideal of *l'honnête homme qui ne se pique de rien*. A perfect gentleman was shown by balance in acquisition and comportment: he might not even learn music too well, lest he should mar the just proportion of attainments. Thus even what is good may be desired in excess, and we have in Greece the warning solemnly emphasised by Ecclesiastes: "Be not righteous over much, neither make thyself over wise." Regarding man's position in the world, too great prosperity also has its danger and may awaken the jealousy of the gods. This sentiment pervades the histories of Herodotus, and is the subject of that famous letter to Polycrates: "It is sweet to learn the good fortune of a friend united to us by ties of hospitality; yet I

am not content with thy great prosperity, knowing the envy of the divine nature; and I may say I wish—both for myself and my connections—to speed here and to fail there in my doings, with chequered fortune. . . . Be therefore persuaded of me and do as I bid in respect of thy prosperity. Consider what thou mayst find of highest value to thee, and what if lost would bring greatest regret to thy heart, and this cast away from thee, so as it shall never again be seen among men." The same thought is common enough in the writers of the period, however the quaintness of its form here is peculiar to the historian. The dramas of Æschylus repeat over and over again the same warning against overripe prosperity whose offspring are insolence and blindness of heart and avenging calamity. In the proper place it would be a fruitful exercise to compare this idea as presented by the tragedian and by the historian. In statecraft Solon had raised it to be the cause of eunomy, or good government, "which," as he says, "should make order and harmony to rule everywhere; which should bind with chains the evil, make smooth the rough, lower false pride, restrain violence, and nip the flowers of calamity in the bud; . . . and under her sway all things among men should become harmonious and reasonable." Theognis and others have the same ideal always before them: indeed it arises naturally enough from human experience.

As this principle of moderation sums up the empirical wisdom of Greek literature, so it is the formal law of the poet and artist. "In der Beschränkung zeigt sich erst der Meister," writes Goethe. In the strict setting of bounds to his own faculties and to his subject-matter, we may perhaps find the chief characteristic of the Greek artist, as form resulting from proportion of parts is the supreme excellence of his work. This voluntary limitation is everywhere discoverable. In language its result is a sharp distinction in style; prose and poetry have their separate vocabularies, and each branch of the latter has its appropriate dialect. It penetrates still deeper into style and causes that justness of emphasis, that avoidance of undue stress which attaches to the word classic. In treatment of the subject-matter the result is no less marked. Thucydides and Sophocles are both Athenians and contemporaries, yet they seem to speak from two different worlds, so sharply defined are the aims of historian and poet. Furthermore, each department of verse has its own laws and themes which together cover the range of human experience, yet never intermingle. A still deeper limitation is observed. Only those subjects and ideas are treated which can be fully and luminously expressed; vague thoughts, fleeting emotions, shadowy similitudes, everything that would blur the general outline, —*la nuance*, in short, is voluntarily renounced. Hence, however other literatures may compare

with the Greek in respect of content, depth of thought, breadth of experience, and fineness of feeling, yet in formal beauty at least the master writers of Hellas have had no rivals. By a sort of racial instinct they are led to avoid excess of any kind. This law of limitation sometimes produces in the works of lesser men a meagreness and jejuneness irritating to the modern reader; but in the masterpieces of the true artists, who sounded the national consciousness, and who were strong enough to hold their ideas and mould them at will, it has brought about a perfect balance and poise comparable only to the sculpture of the same land. Shakespeare may, with Homer, stand apart from other poets. They rise together into the sky like the twin peaks of Parnassus, and in them the Old World and the New meet with equal and sufficient champions. We read Shakespeare and are lost in amazement at the boundless fertility of the human mind. Every word is a metaphor, and all the emotions and thoughts of the heart chase one another through his lines. But sometimes, may it be confessed, we turn with a feeling almost of relief from the unrestrained exuberance of the modern genius to the simplicity and graceful self-control of the ancient. At first, it may be, we miss in the older poem certain profounder voices of the soul that speak of moral claims and experience won by centuries of suffering; we call the Greek shallow. But if the real depth of a poem is to be

measured by its grasp on the essential passions of humanity, there will be found in Homer a truthfulness and vividness in presenting these that may rival Shakespeare himself, while man's relationship to the divine world about and the dark mysteries below is pictured with a simplicity that lends unparalleled beauty to human activity, and with a depth of wisdom, of which forgetfulness and long sophistication have to-day almost deprived us.

"Nothing too much" was the law of the artist in his effort to create; so in abstract terms it defined for the philosopher the process of cosmic creation, or ceaseless becoming, as he would have called it. On the other hand, from a rule of prudential wisdom it passed readily into the ethics of the schools. Beginning with Pythagoras, its influence down through Aristotle may be unerringly traced in a variety of forms. Only with this key can we unlock the strange doctrine of Pythagoras (strange to us but perfectly simple to his countrymen) regarding the finite and the infinite. The finite is good because bounded by just limits; the infinite is bad because it escapes these limits. Numbers are the expression of quantity and limitation, and as such produce the famous Pythagorean harmony ruling in the heavens and in man. Akin to this conception is the formal cause of Aristotle, between which and the earlier theory stand the ideas of Plato as a mediating ground. Matter, according to the

Stagirite, is eternal and formless, form is eternal and substanceless; from the union of these, that is, from the law of limitation, springs the world fashioned harmoniously, as we behold it. And the final cause, which is the aim and purpose of this union, will be satisfied when this infinite amorphous matter is completely subjected to form.

If, morally, "Nothing too much" receives its ultimate expression in the ethics of Aristotle, where every virtue becomes a mean between two vices, the one of excess, the other of deficiency, the sister saying, "Know thyself," may be held to attain its full development in the mystic philosophy of Plato. So in the *Phædrus* we read: "I must first know myself, as the Delphian inscription says; to be curious about that which is not my concern, while I am still in ignorance of my own self, would be ridiculous." Self-knowledge in the Academy became the beginning and end of philosophic discipline. In this sense it may be taken to express the inner spiritual phase of Greek life, just as the "golden mean" gives the model of outward practical conduct. Yet how closely the two formulas are related may be seen in the very philosophers who represent the extreme of each. The argument of Plato's *Republic* amounts to this: By self-knowledge we learn the nature of the soul and of the three faculties working together in it. Consequently upon such knowledge each faculty performs duly its

proper function and attains its respective virtue, —the rational faculty being thus distinguished by wisdom, the will by courage, the sensuous nature by temperance. The fourth virtue, justice, is still to be accounted for. This must be the harmonious interaction of the three faculties, each working within strict bounds and not encroaching on the function of the other two. The highest virtue, then, which practically includes the others, is no more than the application of the Delphian "Nothing too much" to the soul itself. On the other hand, Aristotle's ethical theory may be summed up as follows: Each virtue is defined as the golden mean between two vices; activity of the soul in accordance with virtue is happiness; and happiness is the end of life. The supreme happiness is such activity of the highest faculty of the soul, that is, the reason: man cannot dwell continuously and absolutely in this activity, but can only aim to approach such a state. Its attainment is the contemplative life of the deity passed in self-reflection; and this may be called his distinguishing virtue, for of him activity toward others cannot be predicated. Curiously, Plato starts from self-knowledge and ends with "Nothing too much"; his rival begins with the latter and arrives at self-knowledge. One proceeds from within outward; the other argues from conduct inward.

But this clear distinction, by which the two apothegms express the inner and outer faces of

the same truth, arose only after subtle analysis had been brought to bear on them. Primarily they were used almost without discrimination, as is evident from the passage of Plato's *Charmides* quoted above. "Know thyself" at first meant simply, Know thy place in this world as a man among men, and as a mortal subject to the immortal gods; be moderate, aim not too high. Abundant illustration of this might be offered. Such, for example, is the meaning of the words when put into the mouth of the seven Sages, as may be proved from the number of proverbs that contain the same admonition in different forms, Periander's warning command, "Think as a mortal," being perhaps the clearest exposition of the thought. The worldly Simonides is said to have given similar advice to Pausanias, "Remember thou art a man,"—words whose significance was revealed only too clearly to the overweening general in his last imprisonment. The same lesson is conveyed in the story of Crœsus as told by Herodotus; and Xenophon, doubtless with a reminiscence of the famous dialogue of the earlier historian, relates of the same prince that he asked the Delphian oracle in what way he might pass the remainder of his life happily, and received this answer:

> Knowing thyself, O Crœsus, thou shalt pass through life happy.

Crœsus rejoiced on hearing this, and thought it

an easy task; others we may know, or may not, but any man may know himself. Only after his defeat by Cyrus did he recognise his error; for in attempting to strive with so great a foe he had proved his own self-ignorance. Similarly one of Plutarch's characters in sportive conversation declares that Homer was the author of these proverbs, and maintains that Hector knew himself, who attacked others but "avoided combat with Telamonian Ajax."

These illustrations will show how the primitive meaning of the injunction persisted into a late age. Yet its deeper spiritual force had been partly recognised almost a century before the revolution introduced by Socrates and the sophists. Thus we read in Plutarch: "And Heracleitus, as if he had done some great and serious thing, says 'I searched out myself'; and of the inscriptions at Delphi this seemed to him the most divine, 'Know thyself.'" Aristotle assures us it was from the Ephesian sage that Socrates derived his peculiar use of the words; and we may see for ourselves that the sophists, so far at least as they are represented by Protagoras, follow the same master. To Heracleitus impermanence was the law of existence; like the water of a stream all things pass away, and are yet the same. But there is no reason to suppose he connected this physical theory with his boasted self-searching. It remained for the sophists to effect this unholy alliance. Studying man's nature,

Protagoras finds that the impermanence of phenomena is but a reflection of the instability of the soul looking out upon them, for man is the measure of all things. Know thyself, and thou knowest what is true to thee—for the time being at least; but to another man there is another truth. Verity itself, like the physical world, becomes thus a matter of perpetual flux and change; and the wisdom of Delphi is made the law of shifting impressionism, whether in philosophy or art or conduct. Plato would consider this sophistical skepticism the outcome of a long line of ancestors. His argument is quaintly expressed (*Theæt.* 152 D): "I am about to speak of a high argument, in which all things are said to be relative; you cannot rightly call anything by any name, such as great or small, heavy or light, for the great will be small and the heavy light—there is no single thing or quality, but out of motion and change and admixture all things are becoming relatively to one another, which 'becoming' is by us incorrectly called being, but is really becoming, for nothing ever is, but all things are becoming. Summon all philosophers,— Protagoras, Heracleitus, Empedocles, and the rest of them, one after another, and, with the exception of Parmenides, they will agree with you in this. Summon the great masters of either kind of poetry—Epicharmus, the prince of Comedy, and Homer of Tragedy; when the latter sings of

Ocean whence sprang the gods, and mother Tethys—

does he not mean that all things are the offspring of flux and motion?"

Compare with this flower of impressionism Socrates, who also in a different way made man the measure of all things. Protagoras isolates the individual; there is no spiritual law binding soul to soul; hence there is no truth but merely shifting opinion. Socrates would find in man a spirit which associates him with the divine powers; hidden in himself he thought to discover eternal precepts of wisdom, the same for all men because springing in all from the same source: Know thyself, and thou knowest the truth of the gods. So much I think we may assert of the positive teaching of Socrates; although the words, "Know thyself," still retained something of their simpler primitive meaning, for they were to him an admonition of man's presumptuous ignorance. But their positive force, more or less latent in the master, is found fully developed in the disciple Plato. So, for example, in the *First Alcibiades* we read: "But how can we have a perfect knowledge of the things of the soul? For if we know them, then I suppose that we shall know ourselves. Can we really be ignorant of the excellent meaning of the Delphian inscription of which we were just now speaking? . . . And if the soul, my dear Alcibiades, is ever to know herself, must she not look at the soul; and especially at that part of the soul in which her virtue resides, and at any other which is like this? . . . And

do we know of any part of our souls more divine than that which has to do with wisdom and knowledge? . . . Then this is that part of the soul which resembles the divine, and he who looks at this and at the whole class of things divine, will be most likely to know himself. . . . And self-knowledge we agree to be wisdom."

Socrates and the sophists mark a revolution in Greek thought; with them the mind is first turned inward on herself, and self-consciousness becomes an inheritance of the race. It may be a matter of sad reflection that the people who chose beauty and pleasure before absolute truth should have made Protagoras their spokesman rather than Socrates. Certainly it is a prophecy full of foreboding for the fate of Greece that the one was loaded with riches and honour, whereas the other died a felon's death in the gaol of Athens.

It was to be expected that the Delphian salutation, when so used by Socrates and Plato, would become a sort of catch-word in the Academy. From the Academy the doctrine of self-knowledge, together with other Socratic precepts, passed readily into the discipline of the Stoics. With them, too, happiness is the *summum bonum*, —happiness which is the natural possession, the flower, so to speak, of a virtuous life, and which, indeed, cannot be conceived without virtue. If asked wherein consists the virtuous life, Zeno, the founder of the school, would reply, " In living in conformity with one's self"; and Cleanthes, his

pupil, would enlarge this to "living in conformity with nature." Nor is there any contradiction in these answers. For to Zeno, "living in conformity with self" meant to obey the dictates of reason, which he deemed the highest part of man and the true self. Now to him, as to all the Stoics, the reason was not an isolated power fashioned in the breast of man, but rather a portion of that universal subtile element which they in half-symbolical manner called fire. So far they were pantheists. This subtile element, pervading the world, is divine, is indeed God; and to the degree that a man recognises this force within him and surrenders to its guidance, he grows like to God, and at death passes into the divine nature. Self-knowledge is to Zeno and Cleanthes the root of virtue and happiness, only Cleanthes emphasises more strongly the kinship of this self to universal reason.

This point of view, however, is not peculiar to the Stoics; it marks all the philosophic schools of the period. The old simplicity of life had passed away, and with it the spontaneous joy of living and that unconscious morality whose chief restriction could be summed up in the brief command, "Nothing too much." The youth has grown to man's estate. In place of unconstrained harmony with nature has come the conscious and painful effort to conform his inner being to the dictates of a vague, half-comprehended idea called still by the old name Nature. Patriotism had

been the bond uniting men into brotherhood, and counterbalancing what might otherwise have been a narrow selfishness. With Alexander that local attachment, so restricted and yet so efficient, gives way to an ideal cosmopolitanism whose shadowy bounds embrace gradually the whole realm of existence. In this vague city of the world the homeless spirit of man, finding that relationship to all is kinship with none, is thrown back on itself in brooding revery. The primitive aim of self-knowledge, which would temper action to sobriety, becomes less important than its dormant significance, which absorbs action in contemplation. Plato is already prophetic of the new views; Aristotle, as if to mark off forever the completion of a civilisation, rejects the new ferment and sums up in scholastic terms all that was truly Hellenic in thought and knowledge. Stoic and Epicurean alike receive the tradition of Greece, but add a spirit utterly foreign in character. Stepping beyond the limit set by Aristotle and Alexander, we should be swept on through the mazes of many philosophies that gradually assume the attitude of religions, until we found ourselves in the whirlpool that revolves about Christianity. Our study of "Know thyself" would be lost in the abyss of Gnosticism, for the mystic knowledge of Gnostic and Manichæan alike is but a late-born child of Delphi. Indeed, the command of the god may still be heard above the din of Saint Augustine's theology, as, for

example, in that passage of the *City of God* (xi. 26) where it is expanded into a curious proof or similitude of the Trinity, and stands a true prophet of the Cartesian syllogism. In its last form, *cogito ergo sum*, it may be called the parent of modern philosophy. The sister law, which gave to Greek life its inimitable beauty, is lost to us perhaps forever; the sadder words we have made our own.

Enough has been said to show how truly the Delphian god voiced the moral aspirations of his people. It would be instructive here, were it not out of proportion to our design, to discover how far these laws are recognised by other lands, and how far they are modified or supplanted. I cannot forbear digressing sufficiently to notice the Hindus, who may claim after the Greeks the honour of being the most intellectual people of antiquity, and who likewise displayed their insight by formulating their conception of life.

Tracing the first injunction in Greece, we find that the course of development (which does not always mean progress, be it observed) is "Nothing too much," temperance, self-restraint, Epicurean tranquillity, Stoic apathy. The next step would have carried them into "inattachment" and renunciation, and this is the form it assumes in India; so that the Hindus may be said in this respect to have begun where the Greeks left off. But if we draw the line of genuine Greek thought at Aristotle, there is a wider gap between the two. For to the Stagirite virtue is a deliberate

state lying in the mean as regards ourselves, defined by reason and as the wise man would define it. The wise man here is that good or exemplary character (ὁ σπουδαῖος) whom Aristotle constantly assumes to be the final arbiter of right and wrong. It is he who most adequately exemplifies man as a political being, adapted to his surroundings and acting with approved energy among his fellows; so that in the end the theory of Aristotle rests upon a common-sense empirical view. In one passage (*Nic. Eth.*, ix. 4) he gives a picture of this exemplary character, symbolising the relation of his inner faculties by the attitude of friends to one another; he has strong desires, but these are in accord with reason; he is most keenly attached to life, and contemplation does not supplant but rather completes the general activity of his nature.

Compare with this a passage of the *Bhagavadgîtâ*, the divine lay of India. It is the morning of a great contest and the prince, seeing his own army drawn up for battle and the host of the enemy arrayed in opposition, is suddenly seized with contrition for the many warriors who must perish. In dejection he refuses to fight until aroused by the exhortations of his charioteer, who is, in reality, the incarnate Vishnu. The admonition of the god is drawn out into a remarkable religious discourse:

II. 11. Thou art grieved for those that need no grief, yet
thy words are words of wisdom:

They that have knowledge grieve not for the dead or the living.

19. He who reckoneth It the slayer, and he who deemeth It the slain,
They both distinguish ill: It slayeth not, nor is It slain.

22. As a man putteth off his outworn garments and taketh others new;
So the Indweller putteth off these outworn bodies, and taketh others new.

47. Thy service is in the work only, but in the fruits thereof never;
Be not impelled by the result of works, neither set thy heart to do no work.

48. Standing firm in devotion, and putting away attachment, so ever work on, O Prince:
Also in success or failure be thou indifferent; indifference, too, is called devotion.

III. 25. As the ignorant work because of attachment to works, O Prince,
So without attachment let the wise work for the constraining of mankind.

27. For all works in all places are of a truth wrought by the blind forces of Nature;
Only he that is deluded by egotism thinketh in himself, "I am the doer!"

Here, in place of the law of moderation in desire and action, is a new command, a strange exhortation to work without desire, without attachment, without interest in the result. The author of the *Gîtâ* sees about him a world of

action which bears no discoverable relation to his inner spiritual needs, yet in this futile turmoil he is called by the exigencies of earthly existence to play a part. He would perform the duties of his station, but with complete indifference to the outcome, unmoved by success or failure, incapable of pleasure or pain. The strangeness of the doctrine to us lies in this utter "inattachment," which, be it said, was no mere scholastic abstraction, but the genuine aspiration of a whole people; but to the Hindu it was novel rather because it fell short of the commoner ideal. Beyond "inattachment" lay the utter renunciation of works, which bade the spirit avoid all contact with the world and in its own life of self-contemplation seek for perfect peace:

> Like an uneasy fool thou wanderest far
> Into the nether deeps,
> Or upward climbest where the dim-lit star
> Of utmost heaven sleeps.
>
> Through all the world thou rangest, O my soul,
> Seeking and wilt not rest;
> Behold, the peace of Brahma, and thy goal,
> Hideth in thine own breast.

It is not to be supposed that such a contrast in philosophic principles was without influence on literature. A minute comparison of the epics of Greece and India would show as its effect a radical difference of language and form and sentiment. Look for a moment at the concluding

scenes of the *Iliad* and the *Mahâbhârata*. To the Greek the *Iliad* presented a drama of the profoundest meaning for the very reason that the passions and actions, the tragedy of the plot, sprung from transgression of the highest moral law known to him, the law of moderation. Agamemnon errs in this respect, and the wrath of Achilles is fatal for this reason. The reconciliation of Achilles is brought about by a personal attachment immoderate in its strength, and through it his wrath against the Achaians is converted to rage equally excessive against Hector. Nothing in Greek literature is more perfect in its art than the last scene of the poem, where anger is subdued to pathos, and the immoderate passions subside to measure and temperance. In one sense the action is completed at the death of Hector, but the underlying moral drama is formless and meaningless without the last interview between Priam and Achilles.

On opening the *Mahâbhârata* we seem to have entered into a different world. Monstrous creatures and actions abound, and the force of the poet's imagination is shown, not by the creation of harmonious forms, but by enlarging everything to fantastic immensity. There is no tragedy of human passion, but rather some shadowy conflict of impersonal powers in which the character of the individual man has little part. Briefly, the poem is the story of the contest of two sets of brothers for the throne. At last the rightful heirs

win back their inheritance and the usurpers are crushed. The conclusion is as significant as the final scene of the *Iliad*, for all this preliminary trial is only preparatory to an act of religious renunciation. Now the restored monarch, followed by his four brothers, their common wife, and a faithful dog, abandons the capital and leads them forth as pilgrims to seek the home of the gods. Yet one after another they fall by the way in consequence of some former sin, till only the eldest is left, whose life has been without blemish. Then a very touching incident occurs when Indra appears from the sky and bids the prince mount up with him in his chariot. "Nay," cries the prince, "but I must take this faithful hound along." "There are no dogs in heaven; it cannot be." "Then neither go I thither without this devoted follower." Whereupon the dog suddenly disappears, and in his place stands Dharmarâja, a god, the Lord of Justice, the true father of the prince, who has taken this humble form to prove his son. Together they ascend to heaven; but not even yet is the trial complete. The prince is dismayed to see his wicked cousins sitting with the gods, while his own brothers, he is told, are enduring torments in hell. "Then I too will go thither!" he exclaims, "for it is better to suffer with them than enjoy bliss with the unrighteous." He persists in his resolve and is led by a servant of the gods to the infernal regions, where he beholds his brothers tortured by malignant fiends. Still his

purpose is unshaken; and at last a voice cries out, "Lo, it is all mâyâ, it is illusion!" Whereupon the evil scenes vanish like a dream, and the prince is once more in heaven on his throne amidst the gods; and there too are his brothers and their wife, who welcome him to the reward of bliss. The closing scenes of the Indian epic are not without impressiveness, but they are mystical rather than human; they teach renunciation and not temperance.

As regards knowledge, we are perhaps justly proud in this passing century that the word has acquired almost a new meaning: the past and the future have been added to its sphere. History, as an attempt to re-create foregone times and by sympathy to throw ourselves backward into other surroundings, is essentially a modern achievement. By its side, co-operating with it, stands natural science, with its disregard of past notions and its eye fixed, so far as it regards human conduct at all, on some perfectibility of society to be brought about by the acquisition of mechanical skill. Both study man as caught in a huge movement of evolution. The ancient conceptions of knowledge, whether it be the jñâna of India, or the gnôsis of early Christianity, or the self-knowledge of Greece, all agreed in this, that they ignored the development of society, and recognised some immutable principle upon whose comprehension the present virtue and happiness of the individual depended. Concerning Greek self-

knowledge, enough for the present. As the inward-looking face of that axiomatic Janus it bears the same relation to the Hindu jñâna (literally and etymologically, gnôsis) as was seen to exist between temperance and renunciation. Self-knowledge was the means of establishing moderation. The Hindu deemed the phenomenal world (and no Greek, not even Plato, could quite follow him in this) totally evil, and knowledge was the path of inner renunciation and deliverance. From the beginning of eternity the spirit is mewed by illusion in these shifting material forms. The whole world is but the creation of ignorance, and hence with knowledge ceases to exist, as a stick seen in the road and mistaken for a snake ceases to be a snake when rightly regarded. This jñâna is, too, a kind of self-knowledge. "Know thyself," the Delphian oracle proclaimed, "learn thy individual nature and so bring it into harmony with life about thee." *Tat tvam asi*, "that art thou," is the watchword on the Ganges: "thy soul is itself that god; know this and thy illusive individuality comes to an end, and the world vanishes from about thee." This was not a mere difference of formulated words; it penetrated the very life of the people. With such views of man and nature the Greek became the master of artists in every form of beauty, whereas the Hindu sacrificed all to attain a state of spiritual exaltation, and in religion won a place as the teacher of mankind.

But at last the inevitable question remains: What profit in it all? Why is the fate of Greece only one of the many tragedies that go to make up human history? Temperance, harmony, the proper balancing of faculties and dispositions,— we might safely aver that these, if anything, were calculated to preserve a person or a race against decay and ruin. Other nations perished mainly because they ignored this vital law; and this curious dilemma confronts us, that the degeneracy of a people is accelerated by the very excellence which wrought its earlier greatness. The strength of Israel lay in its uncompromising worship of Jehovah and its intensely narrow national life; yet in the end this same religious bigotry cut them off from the new faith that sprung from their midst and was to regenerate society, while their racial prejudices caused them to be utterly crushed as a nation by the Roman Empire. Again, the greatness of Rome was her power of conquest and government, and Rome at last, absorbed in her dependencies, fell by her own weight. The Mohammedans were rendered doubly invincible by their peculiar fatalism. If death came, it was by the will of Allah, whether they courted or shunned danger; in the days of their vigour, accordingly, they fought with intrepid valour; in their decline they lay idle, for God would accomplish all things whether they acted or not. More tragic yet is the fate of India. With undaunted courage the Hindus sacrificed everything,— power, beauty,

personal aggrandisement,— to lay violent hands on the kingdom of heaven; and for a time they rose to a height of religious grandeur which must now and always be regarded with wonder. But life is not of the spirit alone. The body which they so insolently neglected had its revenge. Spiritual pride degenerated into moral indifference; quietism begot effeminacy; and the proud Hindu fell a prey to all the lusts of his own flesh and to the cupidity of any adventurous conqueror.

But in Greece, where moderation was followed as a kind of religion, what was it that caused the same expansion and decay? Paradoxical as it may sound, may not their error have lain in the very appropriation of such a standard? They, too, made their renunciation, deliberately refusing to accept any absolute idea which might destroy the desired balance. Nothing is absolutely right or wrong; nothing is absolutely true or false; seek only the proper medium in all things. Is not this in itself a kind of excess in raising the expedient and beautiful above that eternal truth which in its nakedness consumed the Hindu as in a devouring fire? If any one thing hastened the fall of Greece, it was her disregard of that stern law of righteousness which overawed the Jew, and that mystic voice within which allured the Hindu to the abysm. Plato somewhere observes: "When any one prefers beauty to virtue, what is this but the real and utter dishonour of the soul? For such a preference implies that the body is more

honourable than the soul; and this is false, for there is nothing of earthly birth more honourable than the heavenly.'' Yet let us read a little in the all-wise Plato even, and turn then to the denunciations of Isaiah or the sermons of Buddha. We are in doubt, when hearing the beautiful words of the Greek, whether to admire the unruffled serenity of his contemplation of life, or to anathematise his lofty tolerance before evils that were eating out the heart of his nation. By the side of Plato grew up another pupil of Socrates, likewise a moralist in his own way, who illustrated perfectly in his doctrine and life the real tendency of Greece,— Aristippus of Cyrene, who made pleasure and beauty the chief good, recognising no evil action so long as a man remained master of himself. To one who rebuked his intimacy with Lais the courtesan, he replied, *Habeo, non habeor ab illa;* and it is he who said, when censured for falling at the feet of the tyrant Dionysius, "I am not to blame, but Dionysius who has his ears in his feet.'' In all his words there is the same wisdom of experience that gives so piquant an interest to the comic fragments of the age. There is grace and charm yet in Greece, but the *Græculus esuriens* is not far to seek. The philosophy of the Cyrenaic is only a new adaptation of the salutation of the Delphian oracle. We hardly know in the end whether these worshippers of Apollo followed his command too well, or only half understood its import.

## NEMESIS, OR THE DIVINE ENVY

From experience and reflection the Greeks formulated a law of conduct, simple in expression, but far-reaching in application. The Delphian aphorisms, "Nothing too much" and "Know thyself," are the refined quintessence of their practical wisdom and moral philosophy, summing up briefly man's duty to himself and society without reference for the most part to any supramundane legislative power. Yet the Greeks were peculiarly sensitive to the immanence of the divine in human affairs, so that a complete understanding of their moral views and their literature is hardly possible without examining this law of moderation and self-knowledge in another form, as adapted to man's relations to the gods.

Here at once occur to the mind those words of the sage Periander, *Think as a mortal*, and the innumerable passages in poets and philosophers that convey the same lesson in dramatic or dialectic form. So in the mouth of Calchas they become for Sophocles the sum of tragic warning: "Misfortune from the gods overtakes men who forget to think as mortals"; and the same words are still heard in the last great prose of Athens. Demosthenes, in one of his eloquent perorations,

recalling the unforeseen revolutions in Grecian affairs,—Sparta humiliated by Thebes, the Syracusans fallen a prey to tyrants, and Dionysius in turn degraded from his proud eminence,— exclaims that the whole world is full of uncertainty and that trivial causes often effect the greatest changes. "Wherefore," he avers, "being men we ought to speak with caution, hoping and praying the gods for prosperity, yet esteeming all things human."

Greece was a land of revolutions so startling that the plea of the orator is more than justified. When the capture of Miletus was represented on the Athenian stage the whole audience, we are told, burst into tears, and the poet was fined a thousand drachmæ for reminding them of the calamity. Yet the fall of the proud Ionian city, ruthlessly sacked and depopulated by the Persians, by no means stands alone in the atrocities of Grecian war. Nor is it a singular story in Greek annals to read of the dethroned Dionysius sailing as a private man to Corinth and consorting in the market-place of that city with shopkeepers and outcasts. And there was no one of the Greeks, the biographer adds, but was eager to see and accost him, some through hatred rejoicing in his overthrow and wishing to trample on one cast down by fortune, others filled with compassion and convinced by the manifest futility and change in mortal things of the power of secret and divine causes.

This actual uncertainty of fortune in Greece lends a tone of realism to the constant outcry of poet and moralist. But even apart from historical causes the Hellenic mind seems to have been peculiarly affected by the precariousness of human state. Life, it appeared to them, was besieged by infinite enemies and held its citadel only by unceasing watchfulness,—as it were the little flame of a lamp cherished in the hand against the buffeting flaws of the night-wind. They might well carve as a symbol of death the inverted and extinguished torch. Such a feeling is, to be sure, a commonplace of poetry, and the Hindu epigrams for example are full of similar metaphors:

> Old age like as a tiger held at bay
> Still crouches; sly diseases day by day
> Our leaguered body sap;
> As water from a broken urn, so leak
> The wasting moments;—lo, this people seek
> Oblivion in love's lap.

But for the Greek, with his eager zest of living and his brave doubt of the future, the thought assumes a poignancy and persistence that render it distinctively characteristic of the race. "Creatures of a day—what are we? what are we not?" cries Pindar; "man is the dream of a shadow!" The bewildered prophetess in the *Agamemnon*, urged by the vision of ruin impending over herself and the house of Atreus, exclaims: "Alas for human things! A prosperous man one might

liken to a sketch; and if he fail—why, then 't is but the brushing of a wet sponge obliterates the picture." And in Sophocles there is this noble image of changing fortune: "Sorrow and joy circle about to each like the revolving ways of the starry Bear. Nor doth the palpitating night remain, nor evil, nor riches—but suddenly they are gone."

Still, however persistently the Greeks may have dwelt on this thought, it is nevertheless one common to the human race, a natural cry of universal experience. Its notable feature here is its connection with the oft-repeated command to think as a mortal, in other words its frank assumption into the religious sphere. Know thyself, and learn moderation in thy dealings with men; know thyself, and learn humility under the jealousy of the divine powers. The mythology of the Greeks, more than that of any other people, is a poetical prosopopœia on an extended scale, and their gods still have meaning for us because they are the most transparent personification of man's emotions and ideals. It was inevitable therefore that this brooding conception of our own littleness in the midst of the threatening forces of nature should be referred to the envy of the gods, and should even assume individual attributes in the Olympian hierarchy as Nemesis and the Erinyes. To us who have been trained up in a religion which emphasises so strongly (in theory at least) the fatherhood and love of God, this acknowledg-

ment of the divine envy may at first appear incomprehensible and even repulsive. An effort of the understanding is required to appreciate this phase of Greek religion, which has permeated and coloured the whole of their literature; so that it becomes imperative, before entering upon a discussion of the subject as treated by Greek authors, to examine the same idea elsewhere and observe how universal it is, although everywhere differently expressed.

What else but this haunting, vaguely conceived dread of a dæmonic jealousy compels the savage to bloody sacrifice and hideous rites, to incantations for exorcising evil spirits — spirits not distinguished from his gods — and for driving away terror from the darkness? What else but a feeling that heaven begrudges man every good thing leads him to utter prayers of supplication?

At the very beginning of the Hebrew religion we are met by one of the most impressive denunciations of the divine jealousy. Though the words are placed in the mouth of the Serpent, they none the less proclaim a feeling deep-seated in the human heart: "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods." Nor were the words of the tempter entirely false; for the knowledge of good and evil brings a godlike element into the actions of man that were otherwise hardly distinguishable from the workings of mechanical force or bestial instinct. The penalty of death,

too, has its celestial ministry in wrapping trivial earthly things in the mystery of the outer silent world; and labour and sorrow may be, after all, the only masters of the higher wisdom. Such an interpretation of the passage in Genesis is by no means a new one. Certain sects of the Gnostics, mingling Oriental and Hellenic ideas with Christian dogma, made this a cardinal point in their faith, boldly denouncing the Jewish God as a malicious power who endeavoured to cheat man of his heritage, and deeming the Serpent a messenger of the truth, a forerunner and type of the Messiah. Again, in the second commandment it is written: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." Now jealousy is near akin to envy, and in fact the same word is elsewhere (Job v., 2) translated envy; yet the slight difference in meaning marks a distinction between Jewish and Greek ideas. According to the latter, the envy of the gods followed any departure from the just limits of man's sphere and any intrusion into the field of celestial action; whereas the Hebrews in their intense monotheistic creed feared the jealousy of Jehovah if in place of blind obedience they strove for knowledge, or if they failed in perfect and exclusive devotion.

Quainter in form is the picture of divine envy in the Indian religion. We are left to wonder a little why the gods of the Greek should suffer this passion. Hardly can they fear the rivalry of man, nor is any such exclusiveness found in their cult

as should arouse jealousy. Here, as in so many other respects, we find the Greek conception presented by the Hindus more logically, so as to satisfy better the speculative reason, but at the same time divested of that moderation and naturalness which lend beauty of form in art and value of example in conduct. It was the ambition of the Hindu sage, by means of penance which should strip the will bare of clogs and magnify its scope indefinitely, to endow himself with supernatural powers, equalling or even surpassing those of the gods. Hence the divine envy; and Indra, the ruler in the sky, receives warning in the drollest manner when any saint begins to grow too mighty for his Olympian security. Immediately the god's throne waxes hot under him, and, thus advised in time, he dispatches a fair nymph or other sweet illusion to seduce the sage from his abnegation, and to enfeeble his will by rendering him once more subject to the flesh. The fable is retained also by the Buddhists, who, however, modify its spirit somewhat. Sakka (the Buddhist Indra, lord of one of the sensuous heavens) must benignantly assist the Buddha, although his own kingdom is to be overthrown by the new teacher. Accordingly, after the four admonitions, when the future Buddha is about to retire from the world and obtain enlightenment, Sakka is made aware of his peril by the customary sign: "At that moment the throne on which Sakka was sitting grew hot. And Sakka,

reflecting who it might be that wished to dislodge him, perceived that the time had come for the adorning of a Future Buddha."

Even the Christian faith, based as it is on the law of mercy, is permeated by the same natural dread. Indeed, one might say that nowhere else does it show itself in such naked austerity as in the rigid logic of Calvin, or in the tremendous denunciations of Jonathan Edwards. God is love; yet, in his omnipotent righteousness, he has created millions of beings who are predestined to everlasting torture. Born into sin, we should seem to behold the heavens blazing above us with wrath and hatred, like those flaming ramparts of the sky which smote Lucretius with a frenzy of horror. The very fundamental idea of an angry deity, whose justice is appeased only by the sacrifice of his own son, raises this envy into such a region of awful austerity as might fill the world with shuddering. As if in mockery, Dante read over the portal of hell:

> Created me divine Omnipotence,
> The highest Wisdom and the primal Love.

This, it may be, is the sterner face of Christianity, yet in the courtly orations of Bossuet we may read here and there sentences that present the old Greek notion of Nemesis in the disguise of Christian garb. "I must raise myself," he says, "above man that I may make every creature tremble beneath the judgments of God. I will

enter, with David, into the might of the Lord." And elsewhere: "Then might she well say with the prophet Isaiah: 'The Lord of hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.'" Again, he quotes from the Gospel: *Væ qui ridetis, væ qui saturati estis*—words of more terrible import than any echoing cry of ancient heathen tragedy.

Apart from religion, a slight examination of literature would show that the master minds, those who have looked directly into the wide interplay of circumstance and searched the human heart without paying allegiance to any dogmatic creed, have bowed to the same belief in the divine envy. It is needless to accumulate illustrations, but one relevant passage may be quoted from Goethe's *Conversations*. "You know," said he, "that Napoleon wore habitually a uniform of dark green. From long use and exposure to the sun this uniform had faded badly, so that it became necessary to replace it. Napoleon wished the same colour, but in the island no piece of cloth of the kind could be found. . . . The master of the world could not obtain the colour he desired, and nothing was left for him but to have the old uniform turned and to wear it so.—What say you to that? Is it not a bit of genuine tragedy? Is there not something pathetic in the sight of the master of kings reduced to wearing a turned uniform? And yet when you think that

such an end befell a man who had trampled under foot the life and happiness of millions of men, destiny, even while turning against him, seems still to have been very indulgent. Here is a Nemesis, who, on considering the greatness of the hero, could not refrain from employing still a touch of gallantry. Napoleon gives us an example of the dangers inherent in raising one's self to the absolute and in sacrificing all to an idea."

We have then in this feeling of man's frailty, in this shrinking before an unsympathetic destiny, one of the universal instincts of mankind; and here as elsewhere the Greek people showed their soundness of moral sense in raising to a general law of conduct the maxim *Think as a mortal*, and their sincerity of religious conviction in elevating the cause of their fear to personality among the gods. The Greeks, voicing in this, too, the common feeling of mankind, waver in their attitude towards this personified fear. At one time it is Erinys who upholds the divine justice, punishing the trespasser only; at another time it is Nemesis, taking pleasure in the downfall of human greatness and sporting wantonly with human pride.

Erinys, if we accept a thoroughly doubtful etymology, was originally a nature myth, corresponding to the Vedic Saraṇyū. But whether Saraṇyū be the dawn that discovers the crimes of the night, or a storm goddess who purifies the air and at the same time kindles house and home,—

whether, in short, we are justified at all in seeking the origin of these ethical divinities in old nature myths is entirely problematical. Certainly in Homer's time Erinys, or the Erinyes, had become altogether severed from any such phenomena. There, as in later literature, they are the demons whose charge it is to maintain the existing order of things and especially to exact punishment for crimes that relax the bonds of society. So in Homer the horse of Achilles is for the moment given human speech to warn his master of coming fate, and then, "when he had spoken thus, the Erinyes stayed his voice." The constellations of heaven tremble before the same power, and from them Plutarch has drawn this admirable lesson: "And he who sees happiness in those who are ever running about and wasting the best part of life in wayside houses and inns, is like to one who should think the wandering planets fare better than the fixed stars. And still each of the planets preserves his appointed order, going about in one orbit as in an island: for neither will the sun, saith Heracleitus, transgress his bounds, else will the Erinyes, the ministrants of justice, overtake him." The beasts are held in silence by these watchful deities, and the inanimate bodies of nature obey their will. Among men they are the guardians of social ties; they have in charge the rights of suppliants, the claims of family, the maintenance of oaths; and theirs, above all, is vengeance for the slaying of

kin. "For this duty," they chant in the play named from them, "this duty remorseless Destiny hath woven for us to hold without swerving, that when a man recklessly slayeth his kin, we should follow after him till he come beneath the earth—yet neither in death is he altogether free." As avengers of perjury, also, their office is to guard the existing order of things; for in Greek the word for oath signifies literally a restraint or boundary, and any infraction of a solemn vow would seem to bring fatal confusion into social life. The gods themselves have their own oath by the imperishable water of the Styx, and the immortal who swears falsely by this daughter of Ocean is for nine years degraded from Olympus and subjected to torment.

With implacable zeal the Erinyes hunt down earthly glory that vaunts itself unduly. So in the play of Æschylus they exclaim: "The vanity of men and their pride that toucheth the sky,—all this melteth at our dark-stoled approach, it wasteth away unhonoured under earth." In these fearful daughters of Night the Greek beheld the penalty that overtakes those who forget in pride or madness to think as mortals: and woe to the man whom some higher law impels to disdain these avenging deities, whether it be a Hamlet of the modern world driven on by conscience and ghostly apparitions, or an Orestes summoned by oracular voices to confront their wrath in pursuance of a sterner duty. And woe to the man

whom the gods have endowed with gifts of superhuman wisdom, for to him also the grace of heaven is not without peril. This inexorable law of the Erinyes would seem to throw light on the strange attitude of Greek literature toward those who have received any form of inspiration or supernatural favour.

For this reason the love of the gods for mortals is represented as full of danger to the recipients and to their offspring. The lament of sad Calypso, when summoned to part with Odysseus, echoes through all the later poets:

> Ungracious gods! with spite and envy cursed!
> Still to your own ethereal race the worst!
> Ye envy mortal and immortal joy,
> And love, the only sweet of life, destroy.
> Did ever goddess by her charms engage
> A favour'd mortal, and not feel your rage?
> So when Aurora sought Orion's love,
> Her joys disturb'd your blissful hours above,
> Till, in Ortygia, Dian's wingèd dart
> Had pierced the hapless hunter to the heart.
> So when the covert of the thrice-ear'd field
> Saw stately Ceres to her passion yield,
> Scarce could Iäsion taste her heavenly charms,
> But Jove's swift lightning scorch'd him in her arms.

The story of Ion, the child of that Creusa who was wooed and abandoned by Apollo, gave Euripides material for one of his most exquisite tragedies. But of all idyls of immortal love the tale of Io and Zeus is the saddest and the richest in meaning. What reader of Greek has not

lingered over her confession in the *Prometheus Bound*,— the maiden visited by visions of the night in her virgin chambers, the tender princess wooed by the sweet voice of dreams, and at last driven forth from her home to be the prey of her divine suitor and to wander helpless over the wide earth. Even between man and woman the power of Eros was fraught with terror, just as his ecstasy of joy seemed to transcend the bounds of safety.

The gift of song came with like peril to the recipient. Demodocus, the rhapsodist of the *Odyssey*, to whom the Muses gave skill in singing but added darkness of sight, and "the blind old bard of Chio's rocky isle," from whom sprang the legend of Homer's blindness, are types of the poetic art bestowed grudgingly by the gods, as if the power of portraying to the inner vision could only be won by closing the eyes on the winsome outer world. In later times the poet was even regarded as subject to a kind of dæmonic possession which deprived him of all worldly intelligence.

Something of the same sort was the madness which overpowered the Bacchic revellers and those who were initiated into other orgiastic rites. The poets are replete with pictures of the Mænads dancing wildly on the mountain ridges, uprending trees in their fury, slaying savage beasts, and devouring the raw flesh. And we know with what horrible awakening one of them, the mother of Pentheus, recognises in her hand the bleeding

head of her son whom, with the other frantic Bacchanals, she has torn limb from limb. Such was the penalty which fell alike upon him who, in his Greek love of moderation, denied the god, and upon her who surrendered herself to his religious enthusiasm.

But still more striking is the fate of the inspired prophets who incurred the jealousy of Olympus for penetrating or divulging its secrets. They are smitten with blindness, or withered by age, or must wander among men as babblers speaking an incomprehensible tongue. Teiresias, with his inner vision and darkened eyes, revolving through seven ages the doom of Thebes, or endeavouring in vain to arouse the guilty Œdipus; Cassandra, tormented by her knowledge of Troy's fate and condemned to inarticulate raving; Helenus, likewise unable to utter words of intelligence to his countrymen,—are witnesses to the danger of wisdom that transcends human bounds. The most graphic scene in the *Argonautica* is the picture of Phineus, blind, shriveled with age, haunted by the Harpies, for his oracular utterance to men of the mind of Zeus. When at last the Argonauts arrive, " he goes forth from his couch like a lifeless dream, leaning on a staff, tottering on his stiffened feet, groping along the wall." There he sits on the threshold before the house and foretells to the sailors the adventures that await them.

It was the thought of this peril attendant on superhuman gifts which led Plato to speak of the

four kinds of divine madness,—the prophetic, the initiatory, the poetic, and the erotic. These are all akin, being essentially a high-wrought symbolism concerned with different elements. One foretells the purpose of the gods by sacrificial and other signs; another displays the indwelling of spiritual faith by the surrender of the reason to a delirious enthusiasm, or presents the mysteries of religion in a symbolic drama; another restores the world of phenomena to the idealising mind by means of rhythmic imitation; and the erotic madness, in its wider sense, awakens the desire of heavenly perfection by the vision of earthly grace. They are all divine because they build a ladder by which the soul may ascend to communion with celestial things; they are a madness because by the influx of these general ideas the relation of the personality to specific things is perturbed,—just as gazing at the stars one might stumble into a well at his feet.

This divine madness illustrates once more the reiterated command to think as a mortal; for the Greek in general deliberately chose sanity within set bounds, in preference to the hazardous harbouring of the unlimited. And as he found beauty and health and reason in such limitations he was content to worship the avengers of such transgression as the peculiar champions of justice. The perception of right order in the world was the source of his moral feeling; and this right order he personified, calling it Themis, the wife

of Zeus and mother of the Hours. Themis, moreover, as knowing the decrees of fate that were to dispose all things in their place, was a giver of oracles and in this capacity preceded Apollo at Delphi. If we could admit a conjecture from an epithet (*Θέμις Ἰχναία*) in the Homeric hymn to Apollo, she was even believed to track the guilty like another Erinys. A comparison with the Vedic *ṛita* and the Zoroastrian *asha* would show how deeply this sense of primitive order in creation is planted in the mind of the eastern Aryans, and would simplify for us the understanding of the Greek gods. The Erinyes who maintain this order are therefore the ministers of justice, but it is not difficult to see how the notion of envy also becomes associated with them. Right order and the justice deriving therefrom would hold every class of created things in its established place, from the inanimate wanderers of the sky to the Lords of Olympus. Yet through the whole world runs an impulse and striving toward a higher plane, which the Greeks could not fail to recognise, and to which the Hindus have given expression in this terse epigram:

> The rooted trees would walk; the beast
> For utterance yearning still is dumb;
> Man toils for some far heaven, wherefrom
> The enthronèd gods were fain released.

Naturally, then, the powers who oppose this instinctive aspiration seem to be animated by a

kind of envy; and the injunction to think as a mortal becomes both a moral law and a maxim of prudence. For the most part, the Erinyes maintain their character as guardians of the moral sense, whereas the fear of the divine envy is personified in Nemesis. Yet, occasionally this distinction is overlooked. For instance, in the *Odyssey* the daughters of Pandareus are snatched away by the Harpies and given over to the Erinyes, because they were too highly favoured by certain of the gods. So, too, in the *Iliad* Erinys, acting with Zeus and Destiny, sent upon Agamemnon the infatuation that brought about the fatal quarrel.

Nemesis is a late addition to the Pantheon, and the divine envy was recognised long before her advent. Homer already detected this trait in the counsels of Olympus. We remember how Poseidon envied the Phæacians their sea-craft; how Eurytus challenged Apollo to a contest of the bow and was killed by the irate deity; how the sons and daughters of Niobe were slain because she equalled herself to fair-cheeked Leto who had borne only two children, whereas she had brought forth many,— Niobe, symbol it may be of the fruitful season of spring withered by the darts of the sun, type of human pride and love smitten by the hand of destiny. "Alas, most wretched Niobe, thee I call a god, who in thy rocky tomb forever weepest." Certain features of Homeric worship also may spring from the same source.

The offering of first fruits and the pouring of libations seem to arise from a haunting dread that the gods unless propitiated may be jealous of man's prosperity; and it may be that in our habit of saying grace before meat there lurks a remnant of the old uneasiness.

Passing to Hesiod, we notice a marked development of the idea. From being an occasional whim of the gods, envy is now reckoned one of the chief motives animating Zeus in his government of the world, and hence the consistent picture of the labour and hardship and humility of man's lot. In Homer libation and sacrifice served to propitiate the divine favour; Hesiod draws from the sacrifice his quaintest allegory. The story of Prometheus is twice told. According to the *Theogony*, the sacrificial victim is divided into two portions, and Zeus is deceived by the rich envelope of fat. Enraged at this, he denies to man the use of fire, which the Titan however conveys to earth in a hollow reed. Thereupon Zeus takes revenge by creating an evil plague against man. Strange that this ancient theologian should have laid his finger on the weak spot of the generations to come, and foreseen the Nemesis that was to destroy them. Beauty made perfect by the cunning of the gods, beauty and pleasure in the form of woman, is sent upon the world; and when the fair evil is brought into view, gods and men are filled with wonder at the work of fatal, inexplicable treachery. In the *Works and*

*Days* the story varies slightly. Here the woman is called Pandora, the possessor of all gifts; and here we read of the urn from which all calamities flow upon the earth—only hope is left behind.

This Promethean struggle between the intelligence of man and the forces that oppose his activity contains the whole conception of the divine envy, but as yet only in germ. The first poet to recognise the full scope of the myth seems to have been the uncertain author of the *Cypria*. It is well known that a succession of poets, after the example of Homer, took up the vast cycle of legends that begins with the battle of the Titans, passes through the Theban and Trojan wars, and relates the death of Odysseus at the hands of Telegonus, his son by Circe, concluding with the tasteless espousal of Telegonus with Penelope and Telemachus with Circe, who all enjoy immortality together in the island of the enchantress. These epics are the so-called Cyclic poems; and among them the *Cypria*, if the number of quotations from it in later works and its influence on legendary mythology are trustworthy evidence, held the place of honour. From the fragments preserved and the summary of Proclus the entire plot of the poem may be reconstructed, which, omitting certain episodes, proceeds as follows: A conference is held between Zeus and Themis, at which the Trojan war is planned. Eris is thereupon sent among the gods assembled as guests at the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis; she stirs up

Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite to contend for the palm of beauty. The three goddesses at the command of Zeus are led by Hermes to Mount Ida, where Paris, bribed by Aphrodite with the proffered possession of Helen, gives the award to the Cyprian deity. In this connection the amours of Zeus and Nemesis are related, and the birth of their daughter Helen. Paris, at the suggestion of Aphrodite, builds a ship and prepares to sail with Æneas to Greece, although Helenus and Cassandra prophesy the ruin to come. The Trojan brothers are received by Menelaus in Sparta, where at a banquet Paris tempts Helen with gifts. Menelaus, being called away to Crete, bids Helen entertain the guests until they depart. Aphrodite now brings Paris and Helen together, and they sail away at night, taking many possessions with them. A storm sent by Hera drives them from their course, but with the aid of Aphrodite they finally reach Troy. There the nuptials of Paris and Helen are celebrated, and the Trojans, by partaking in the ceremony, become sharers in the guilt. Iris conveys to Menelaus news of what has happened, and he, with Agamemnon and Nestor, collects an armament against Troy. After a mistaken expedition against Teuthrania, the forces are a second time mustered at Aulis, where occurs the memorable sacrifice of Iphigenia. For Agamemnon, while hunting, brings down a stag, and in his elation boasts to excel Artemis herself, so that the angered goddess

sends continual storms which prevent the fleet from sailing. Calchas declares the cause of the deity's wrath, and orders that Iphigenia be sacrificed to appease her. The young princess is sent for, under pretext of wedding her to Achilles. She is bound on the altar, but when the knife is raised to immolate the victim Artemis intervenes, secretly conveying the maiden to Tauris and substituting a fawn in her place. The army now sails for Troy. Protesilaus, the first to disembark, is slain by Hector; Achilles drives back the Trojans in rout; and the long war of ten years begins.

When, to this outline of the plot, the numerous episodes are added,—such as the story of Castor and Pollux, the sack of Epopeus, the tragedy of Œdipus, the madness of Hercules, the loves of Theseus and Ariadne, the expedition against Teuthrania and the tale of Telephus, the amour of Achilles and Deidamia, the abandonment of Philoctetes, the first quarrel of Agamemnon with Achilles, and the foraging excursions of the early war,—we can form an idea of the wealth of legendary matter in the poem and appreciate the extent of its influence on later literature. Hence we are justified in saying that this uncertain Cyclic poet (whether Stasinus, or Hegesias, or another is unknown) more than any other individual writer gave currency to the notion of Nemesis and the divine envy. The skill with which the poet weaves this motive through the narrative is at

once remarkable. The opening lines are preserved, and at the outset Zeus is seen counselling with Themis (goddess of order) against mankind who have waxed too numerous for the broad earth: "There was a time when innumerable tribes of men wandering over the land weighed down the width of deep-breasted earth. And Zeus, beholding this, had pity and in his mighty heart laid a plan to relieve the all-nourishing earth of her load, fanning the flames of that great strife of the Trojan war that he might lighten the load by death. So in Troy the heroes were slain, and the will of Zeus was accomplished." The first words of Greek epic, it will be remembered, tell how the "will of Zeus was accomplished" by the wrath of Achilles, and here the Cyclic poet seems to have taken up the expression and developed its meaning in accordance with his own ideas.

The grammarian who quotes these verses of the *Cypria* gives a double reason for the action of Zeus. The earth, he says, was overburdened with the multitude of men, and, furthermore, there remained no piety among them,—and this double reason corresponds to the ambiguous character of the divine wrath as envy directed against man's overweening greatness and as justice pursuing his evil courses. The same grammarian points out the twofold means employed to carry out the divine purpose. Zeus is persuaded by Momus not to destroy the whole race with thunderbolt or deluge, but on the one hand to bring about

the union of the mortal Peleus with the immortal Thetis whence should spring Achilles, and on the other hand himself with Nemesis to beget the beautiful Helen. One can hardly praise too highly the invention by which these two events are brought together,—the discord at the marriage of Peleus, the decision of Paris, who reflects the thought of the Greek poet in giving the prize to the goddess of beauty, and the rape of Helen, who thus becomes the instrument of vengeance. Already in Homer Helen is a strangely significant figure, and in the proper place it would be interesting to follow her down through Greek literature. Here it is sufficient to note the new version of her birth which makes her the child of Nemesis, instead of Leda. The fragment telling of the amour of Zeus and Nemesis deserves to be quoted in full: "And after these, the third he begot Helen, a wonder to mortals, whom fair-haired Nemesis mingling in love with Zeus bare to the king of the gods by hard necessity; for she fled and wished not to join in love with Zeus Cronion, the father, and was troubled at heart with shame and indignation. Over land she fled and over the black unharvested water. And Zeus pursued, longing in heart to seize her. Now like a fish she sped through the waves of the loud-resounding sea and stirred up the mighty deep, and again over the ocean stream and the ends of the earth she wandered, and again over the fertile mainland. And ever, to escape him, she took the form

of all the wild monsters nourished by the earth." So Helen the daughter becomes, as it were, a human nemesis to work the will of her father; nor is there anything inconsistent in the union of this invidious office with her supreme beauty. Through fragments of broken tradition we gather that her mother, the Nemesis of the poem, contained a like seeming contradiction in her immortal nature.

The Greeks were slow to admit Nemesis into their pantheon, and to the end her personality was far more shadowy than that of the Erinyes. The word is derived from the root meaning *to distribute*, and hence belongs in thought to that large group of terms which by their etymology show the association of ideas in *distribution*, *order*, *destiny*, *justice*, *retribution*, *indignation*, *envy*. Homer employs the word nemesis only as an abstract. Its use in Hesiod is more doubtful. The *Works and Days* announces that Nemesis and Shame, at the coming on of the iron age, clad themselves in white raiment and departed from earth to join the immortal gods. Here Nemesis is clearly the half-personified feeling of justice and righteous indignation among men. But in the *Theogony* of the same poet we are told that "pernicious Night bare Nemesis also, a bane for mortal men." There is no sufficient reason for rejecting this line, with certain critics. The two passages are of great interest as showing the transference of human feelings to the gods and

the personification of abstract ideas in the very process. In the *Cypria* this ethical Nemesis seems to have coalesced with an obscure legend of a nymph of the same name, sprung from the ocean like Aphrodite, probably indeed only a local manifestation of the great goddess; so that in a double sense, as instigator of Paris and mother of Helen, the queen of beauty is made the seducer and scourge of mankind. It is not easy to decide how much of this allegory was conscious in the mind of the epic bard; but to us at least who look back on that old literature and weigh the strength and error of that wonderful people, this early union of Nemesis with Aphrodite carries a haunting lesson. Its significance, however, was soon lost, for the two deities were disassociated and Nemesis, to the later poets, became again a separate person.

Other details of the Cyprian epic were more fruitful of imitation. The tragic story of Œdipus, the madness of Hercules, the fate of Protesilaus, show the working of Nemesis in the episodes of the poem, and must have influenced succeeding writers. The ravings of Helenus and Cassandra were not forgotten in later pictures of madness sent by the divine envy. But most popular of all was the pathetic story of Iphigenia, the echo of whose lamentation is still heard in modern literature. Iphigenia, laying down her young life on the altar to appease the envy of the goddess, stands as the fairest, the most touching, emblem

of the dread that has haunted man's heart from of old, the purest example of the sacrifice demanded by the religious instinct whether pagan or Christian. She furnished a theme for several of the noblest of Greek tragedies; her fate animated the bitterest lines of Lucretius, ending with those words which the world has not forgotten and can never forget, *Tantum religio!* Her story has inspired modern poets to revive the beauty of ancient mythology; and, among others, taught Landor to write verses that contain perhaps more of the true classical spirit than any other poem of the past century.

So far we have been dealing with pure mythology, with that form of art where symbol and abstract thought are barely distinguishable. But with the coming of the fifth century begins an age of reflection or theology. Pindar stands at the threshold of the new period; and in him myth and theology, symbol and abstraction, speak side by side. Pindar is the accepted singer of aristocracy, the clear-voiced herald of splendid wealth, of magnanimous deeds, of regal pride, of unpitying strength. His odes unroll before us the pageant of all that is glorious in individual achievement. As in the golden pomp of triumphal processions, his heroes pass before us wearing the insolence of perfect self-reliance and with the smile of unembittered victory. By their side move the blessed Olympians, bright with the effulgence of immortality. Gods and men hold

converse together, heedless of the thronging multitudes that shout in acclaim: they lean upon one another in graceful confidence, so that the eye fails now and again to distinguish between deified mortal and humanised god. Yet listen more attentively to the poet's hymns of victory, and the ear will be struck by one note that is sounded over and over again: "Be bold, be bold; be not too bold!" Nowhere else is the lesson of worldly moderation so intimately blended with its divine counterpart. Through all the exultant laudation the warning words return, in every variety of form. Now it is direct admonition: "Seek not to become a god"; now it is a picture of man's littleness, who is but "the dream of a shadow"; now it is a hint conveyed in parable or fable; again the poet recalls the frightful stories of old-world mythology, Tantalus, Typhus, Ixion, Tityus, Bellerophon, and others, all overwhelmed in their mad efforts to rival the gods; and again he himself bows before these gods whose jealous wrath threatens the glory even of the poet who adores them.

From the golden-mouthed singer of the heroic days we turn naturally to the historian who celebrated the same period in no less famous prose. Herodotus occupies a unique position in literature, for the reason that he, more than any other, combines two aspects of thought which make of him at once a master historian and a complete exponent of the essentially Greek spirit. He was

endowed with the wondering eye of the child. In the gardens of the Luxembourg, or elsewhere it may be, we have seen a circle of children enthralled by the antic play of a puppet show; as we watched them, gradually their enthusiasm crept upon us until all the silly mechanism of the tiny stage was forgotten; the painted dolls became living creatures, their passions moved us to laughter or tears, and the voice of the hidden manager spoke with oracular wisdom. So Herodotus looked upon the world's stage with the wonder of childlike delight; and, reading his long narration, we are seized by the same intoxication. The sordid wires and pulleys of history are for a while ignored, all the nobler motives of humanity wake a responsive chord in our hearts, and always we hear the voice of the oracles of the gods, uttering words of admonition and encouragement. Were there nothing else in the historian's pages, he would still rank among the great writers of the world; for deep in our breast there remains a haunting suspicion that somehow with the experience of age we have lost another, different wisdom of childhood. But, side by side with this uncontaminated vision, there runs through Herodotus a vein of profound and mature reflection. Here we discern the keen eye of the philosopher who detected through all the tangle of events the one paramount conflict of reason with unreason, so that, following his record of the wars of Greece and Persia, together with their long preparation,

we seem to read once for all the struggle of the human race. The victory at last is splendid; but at every turn of the narrative, like a true Greek, he insinuates his subtle warning, and the lesson is the same as Pindar's, now made solemn by the weight of historical example: Be bold, yet leaven pride with humility beneath the eye of divine envy. In the introduction to his work he writes: "The cities which once were great are now for the most part insignificant, and those that are at present illustrious were formerly small. Knowing then the precarious nature of human felicity, I shall speak of both alike." A little further on, as if to give us in dramatic form the key to all that follows, he introduces the memorable scene between Crœsus, the type of human prosperity, and Solon, the mouthpiece of cautious wisdom. The Athenian would count no man happy until the end were seen, for oftentimes God gives men a gleam of happiness and then plunges them into ruin. Nay, man is but a thing of accident, and the divine nature is full of envy and prone to send tribulations. And after the departure of Solon, the historian adds, a great nemesis from God came upon Crœsus, presumably because he deemed himself the most prosperous of men.

It may be a matter of astonishment that this perpetual fear of Nemesis never in Greece degenerated into vulgar superstition. The Romans also shrunk from the divine envy, and how different is the manifestation of their dread! There we

may behold Cæsar, startled in his triumphal procession by an unlucky chance, climbing up the steps of the Capitol on his knees; and Augustus, terrified by nocturnal visions, begging alms on a certain day each year, stretching out his hollow hand to the people; we may behold Claudius also mounting the Capitol on his knees, and the spectacle will teach us the difference between servile superstition and the free play of imagination. Well might the insolent conquerors of the world cringe before the wrath of Nemesis, and the downfall of the "Eternal City" may stand as the most eloquent proof of her inexorable judgments.

The literature of Rome offers few examples of belief in a personal Nemesis, for the mythopœic faculty never flourished in that materialistic city. But, on the other hand, Rome gave to the world the two great religious poets of antiquity in whom the sense of the divine envy speaks in clear and diverse accents. Mention has already been made of Lucretius and his use of the Iphigenia legend. From beginning to end, his work is inspired by the same feeling of horror toward the gods as they appeared to him in mythology. His soul is tortured by the universal dread of a watchful malignant power in the sky, by the servile homage and degrading worship exacted from men, by the cruel deeds perpetrated in the name of religion, and by visions of future punishment. To escape once for all from this superstition of divine envy, he would utterly sweep away religion and the hopes

of a future life. To Epicurus who has unburdened the heart of these errors he vows himself as to a hero greater than Hercules, who freed the earth of physical monsters: "When human life lay shamefully grovelling on the earth, oppressed by religion which showed her head from the regions of the sky lowering down upon mortals with horrible aspect, then first a man of Greece dared raise aloft his mortal eyes and take stand against her. Him neither rumours of the gods constrained, nor thunderbolts, nor the sky with threatening murmurs; but only the more these things embittered his mind with desire to break down first the narrow bars of nature's door. Therefore the living power of his mind prevailed; therefore he proceeded far out beyond the flaming ramparts of the world and with heart and soul traversed the vast immensity." Such is his boast: and in the empty spaces of the world what did he find to replace the hated powers? Only a blind, swirling tempest of atoms which obey no law but that of chance. And the comfort he found for the human soul was like that which a later bard brought back from the *City of Dreadful Night:*

> Good tidings of great joy for you, for all:
> There is no God; no Fiend with names divine
> Made us and tortures us; if we must pine,
> It is to satiate no Being's gall.

Lucretius consigned the gods to a far-off limbo of unconcerned ease; Virgil retains them as a kind

of poetical machinery for his poem, although in reality granting them no more authority than the Epicurean. To replace them, he introduces the working of Fate into the world, a power as impersonal as chance and equally devoid of responsibility. Its iron sway, whether it be called *fortuna omnipotens* or *inexorabile fatum* or *ineluctabile tempus*, is more pitiless than the divine envy of the Greeks; there is no heart in the *fata aspera* for sympathy with human labour. Virgil would replace the whims of Nemesis by a vast design of Providence toward which the workings of Fate inevitably move. Yet this Providence is as impersonal as the decrees of Fate which it executes; and Æneas, carried on irresistibly to establish Rome, herself the symbol of destiny on earth, must endure every personal sacrifice,—the desolation of his home, years of wandering, shipwreck, the abandonment of love, cruel wars,—all that his heart desires is swallowed up by the exigencies of envious necessity. So, too, in the memorable passage of the *Georgics*, where Virgil gives freest utterance to his own views and longings, what is it lends such peculiar pathos to the lines but the feeling that somehow happiness forever floats just beyond, and there needs but an effort on our part to penetrate the clouds and behold its unsullied glory,—only some strange fatality in our breast remorselessly holds us back! *O fortunatos nimium, sua si bona norint*, he begins. Alas, too happy indeed! I know not if it may appear a

bit of pedantic subtlety, but in the single word *nimium* I seem to read all the pathos of man's vain aspirations beneath the frown of an incomprehensible Nemesis.

The chance and fate of the Roman poets, however, carry us out of the field of mythology. The most notable effort to rationalise the divine envy within mythology is the great trilogy of Æschylus presenting the story of Orestes. His picture of the Erinyes pursuing the house of Atreus as an inherited curse is the most sombre in Greek literature. Yet, after all, they are the ministers of justice; in the end they are appeased, and, losing their savage aspect, remain as the Eumenides, the kindly-disposed, the guardians of the Athenian state. And if this fair allegory leaves unaltered the real Nemesis who broods over human weakness, still there is a word of consolation even here. Zeus has appointed, the poet writes, that we grow wise through suffering; and again and again he hints that the soul may win, at the last, her own profit from the envy of fortune. It is the old saying of Genesis: "Ye shall be as gods knowing good and evil."

With this word of good omen we may close. If our study of the divine envy seems to leave the subject after all as an unsolved problem, we only reproduce in this the attitude of the Greeks themselves. Let us not be deceived: these questions that touch man's deepest moral experience are not capable of logical solution; indeed, they lose all

reality as soon as subjected to dogmatic definition. So it is always refreshing and stimulating to come into contact with a people who faced these problems frankly and naturally, without the restraints of revelation or sophistication or indifference. From his perception of harmony in the world the Greek created the Erinyes, the upholders of order; from his experience of man's frailty he bowed to Nemesis; and these two, the divine justice and the divine envy, worked side by side, now perfectly distinct and again inseparably blended. At times he seemed to discern a higher purpose speaking through the events of human life, but still his mind was too upright to avow any real understanding of what transcended his own vision. Always he drew one lesson from Erinyes and Nemesis alike: "Think as a mortal"; and these words he made the religious complement of the still more famous command which Apollo spoke to him from the portal of the temple at Delphi.

THE END

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